

HAPPY HOUSES
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HAPPY HOUSES

HAPPY · HOUSES

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*Non tantum corpori sed etiam moribus
salubrem locum eligere debemus*

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Preface

"She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness."

PROVERBS.

THERE are gloomy philosophers and Teutonically minded poets who will have it that the majority of us are dead, and that we live not in houses, but in mausolea. Over the portals of every house in London (except their own) they see inscribed the epitaph of John Keats :

"Here lies one whose name was writ in water,"

and ignore the fact that in the greater number of houses there are children growing up in wonder to the battle of life, and men and women in the thick of it, and thoroughly enjoying it. To be sure, society is a little mixed : it is a disjointed, creaking sort of machine, and there are many people who are too rich, and far more who are too poor, and a certain number who from over-feeding, over-drinking, or excess of vanity, are, in fact, dead people, usurping the place and room of the living. There are very few who are so dead that the breath

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of life cannot reach them through art, or pity, or some crisis in their human affairs. Very few houses in the world can be dismissed as mausolea, just as there are very few human beings who have lost the right to cry :

*“Orribil furon li peccati miei ;
Ma la bonta infinita ha si gran braccia
Che prende cio, che si rivolge a lei.”*

When it comes to the point, I cannot imagine that any will be rejected by the infinite goodness which lies at the heart of the world. What I call “happy houses” are those in which there is the light, be it never so faint, of this infinite goodness : and unhappy houses, dead houses, mausolea, are those over the doors of which hypocrisy has written :

“All hope abandon ye who enter here.”

I offer no prescription, no nostrum. I am no morality-monger, nor analyst, to probe into seedy problems. The dreadful tales that houses can tell of the doings and wretched thoughts of their inhabitants may be whispered to the novelists, who nowadays seem to welcome them only too gleefully. I brush them aside, install a charwoman, clear up and start afresh, with the determination that every room, from scullery to drawing-room, shall be made sweet and fresh and fragrant, and

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meet and fitting to the character of those who are to live in them. Life and energy are not long enough for me to tackle every house in London ; indeed, I could not approach more than three or four without impertinence ; but what cannot be done in the flesh can be done in literary guise. The pen is a magic wand. I take it in my hand, call up my imagination, and, hey presto ! all doors are open to me. While I weave words cunningly I can exert a spell, so that I am nowhere rejected. Like the old minstrels, I knock at the Englishman's castle and earn good company and a corner by the fireside by song, and I am allowed to stay until I become a bore, as, no doubt, even the old German Minnesingers were apt to grow tiresome. A book has this advantage over a minstrel, that it can be laid down at any moment, while the minstrel must of your courtesy be permitted to end his song, thrice irritating though it be.

My book, then, is neither more nor less than a key with which I admit myself to the houses of persons unknown to me, so that I may in imagination exercise upon their belongings a passion for the right arrangement of rooms, furniture, and hangings, which my own small London house and cottage in the country cannot satisfy. . . . Passion will out, and faith will for ever be moving

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mountains, but, life being full of limitations, most often passion and faith have to be content with expression in literary form. Heaven knows I would rather be given ten houses with which to busy myself than write a book; but ten houses are not forthcoming, and pen, ink and paper are ready to hand! Therefore, I set out upon my pilgrimage, like a canvasser, from house to house, recording what I see there, and noting down what I should like to see, which, when all is said and done, is entirely a matter of opinion.

My pilgrimage is to be in London, for there, since I emerged from youth and the provinces, my life has been lived, in and out of studios, in and out of theatres, the shops, the houses of the great and the small, and it has all been amusing and entertaining, and very, very exciting, and when I meet my various dead selves, there are very few of them I feel inclined to cut! When I look back on the years and see myself as I was when I arrived from the country, I feel very much as the soul of Whiteley's must feel—if Whiteley's has a soul—when it looks out of its magnificent new palace upon the shabby row of shops in Westbourne Grove; and I wonder if it is not mere foolishness and a pretence to think, as so many of us do, that all the joy and all the splendour of life are in the golden haze of

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youth. I feel quite sure it is not so. It may have been so twenty, thirty, forty years ago. Then the new Whiteley's could not have been, nor could middle age have been so rich as now it is, nor could there have been so many happy houses as now there may be, if the new instinct for life and the feeling of new birth, which is finding its way into books and plays and pictures, and especially into music, can reach expression in common household things. Books, plays and pictures, if they are honest and true art, feed the thirsting mind. It profits men and women little if they issue from the drab and dull and workaday into a region of enchantment, only to slip back again ; but, if they can take some of the enchantment back into their homes, then there is hope for them, and they have done their share in the work of making the world better than they found it, and clearing away the physical and moral lumber of the ages, which cramps and weighs so heavy on us all.

All this is to be taken not as a sermon, but as a declaration of faith, which is perhaps what all good sermons are, and what all sermons ought to be, a declaration to be taken or left, according to the state of mind of the hearer.

Now, in my pilgrimage, I am to be nothing if not practical, and, in my view, the practical is

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that which makes for life, the unpractical is that which destroys and hurts life. I hold, with many others, that in the offices of all architects there should be at least one woman, who has or has had much experience of the conduct of a household. No man, it seems, can ever grasp the right use or placing of a cupboard, and, to this day, the unthinking male has so little conception of the labours of the woman of the house that all scullery sinks are built at least nine inches too low, so that the never-ending work of washing-up has to be done in a cramped, stooping position. There are never enough shelves, or cupboards, in a kitchen, and architects have not realised the excitement and fun there is to be got from squeezing odd corners off the available space to serve the thousand and one purposes that occur in a highly organised household. An architect is a licensed person, a creature of authority with all sorts of important letters after his name, and he is apt to impose his own routine upon the unsuspecting householder who calls him in, and the house is adapted according to a pattern, just as dresses are made according to a Paris model. The pattern may be good in itself, but, unless the architect is a person of insight and perception, it is probably quite unfitted for that particular house and that particular house-

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hold. You can't expect a person who belongs to the 'nineties and the Morris period to be pleased with what satisfies and delights a modern Lutyens or Voysey householder. Nobody, of course, has any business to stop short at Morris, but many people do, and we have to take the world as we find it, that is, take the good in Morris, the good in Lutyens, and the good in Voysey. By doing that we blot time and periods out of consideration and set ourselves, within our limitations, to procure everything as good as it can be for our own happy houses. Like the banished duke, we shall find

*" . . . books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything."*

Indeed, that is what I have been doing for some years during a voluntary exile in the country. The exile, happy or unhappy, has very little else to do. Heine, in his passionate love for his Fatherland, abused it roundly. That kept him occupied. Peter the Great built ships at Deptford. Garibaldi fell in love and married. Byron—there are only too many books about Byron! However, they all did in some way or another come to the attitude of the banished duke, except Shelley, who died too young. The exile, voluntary or otherwise, is like the man in the "Pilgrim's Progress":

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“ I dreamed, and behold, I saw a man clothed with rags, standing in a certain place, with his face from his own house, a book in his hand, and a great burden upon his back.”

I am not sure but a state of exile is not the ideal state in which to pass this life of ours. The most comfortable way in which to procure it—without interfering with or annoying other people—is to have two or three houses, so that you can be happy in any one of them, while at the same time you have the zest of regretting and looking forward to the others. In this way you can be both at home and in exile, and there is no danger of ever being bored, for as soon as it becomes a mere habit to live in one house, you can pack up and go away to another. The poor and the lower middle classes achieve this in another way by frequent removals: some of the very poor at least once a fortnight, the better classes perhaps once in three years. That is easy enough with houses taken on a weekly or quarterly agreement, or tenancy from year to year, but when you rise into the superior classes, which support the ubiquitous house-agents, there are dreadful legal obligations, leases, fines, premiums and what not. Then, in that case, where a house becomes a responsibility, it is absolutely necessary to adopt my

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plan of temporary exile. Hiring somebody's house is not nearly so efficacious, for that is an exile under difficulties, an exile which is an irritation : there is no rest nor refreshment for the spirit in living with someone else's furniture.

So much for exile.

My real task and amusement is the consideration of Home *not* from the point of view of the Frenchman in *Fanny's First Play*.

One person singly cannot make a home : two or more persons separately cannot make a home : wealth has nothing to do with it : health has something : *la bonta infinita*, infinite goodness, or if you prefer it, love, has everything, not necessarily love between husband and wife, or man and woman, but between friends, a mother and daughter, sisters, a brother and a sister, and I have known a perfect home built upon the love between a lonely man, a dog, a cat, and many birds : but since the word love has come to be so associated with the mystery between a man and a maid, which so puzzled Agur the son of Jakeh, when he spake unto Ithiel and Ucal, I prefer to speak of *la bonta infinita*, or kindness, as a wider and more general and generous expression.

I am the more eager for the atmosphere of home, the kind atmosphere, as my house in London,

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in which I am at present in healthy exile, looks out upon a row of lodging-houses, each of which contains an incredible number of people, so that it looks as though the owners of them and the servants necessary to keep them up must have learned how to sleep with the swallows under the eaves. The lodgers, it seems, come from all parts of the world, and their luggage arrives with romantic hotel labels—Cape Town, Yokohama, Wellington, N.Z., Buenos Ayres, Colombo : enough to make a restless person go down to Cockspur Street and book a passage straight away. . . . One house has an inexhaustible capacity for children. It is as hungry for them as any ogre, and they are packed so tight in it that when the door is opened two or three of them fall out and are picked up and taken in by the charitable neighbours. Dark subterranean passages connect these houses, for the ayah who goes in with her baby at Number 32, is quite likely to come out at Number 38 without her baby. . . . It is all very mysterious, and except that they contain so much teeming life, the houses would be depressing ; for a peep into them shows only ugliness and darkness. Birds of passage cannot well choose their surroundings, but I hate to think of those close-packed children living with red-plush and antimacassars and the late Sir Edwin

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Landseer's portrait of the Prince Consort as a sportsman.

The row of lodging-houses and my exile's regrets for the country are responsible for my pilgrimage in quest of a home. Lodgings cannot be perfect: perhaps they cannot be beautiful: but they should certainly not be offensive and a deliberate attack upon all the domestic and gregarious instincts of humanity. Since—as my eyes tell me—children are to live in them, they should at least be worthy of children, and not hurtful to them. As it is, I am given to understand that in the close-packed house there is a considerable competition among the children as to who shall fall out when the door is opened, and those who lose stand in pathetic rows at the window gazing for the greengrocer's cart to bring its brave splash of colour—plums and lemons and carrots—into the street.

So then I set lance in rest, and charge down on the lodging-houses. . . . However, upon reflection, it is perhaps wiser to refrain from causing a revolution there just yet. No one can tell what the result of a revolution may be, and such precipitate action seems cruel when all these little ones are living away from their parents. . . . No ! The proper method of inducing a revolution is

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to write a book. Rousseau wrote "La Nouvelle Héloïse," and in course of time, like yeast in dough, it raised the French people to the pitch of action, concerted and individual. Bearing in mind the lodging-houses and also my own regrets for the country, I shall adhere to my original intention of using my pen as a skeleton-key wherewith to unlock the doors of such houses as shall take my fancy. The revolution I have in my mind's eye is nothing more than a *rapprochement* between the lodging-houses and houses like them and the beauty I have left behind me in the country. . . . There is beauty in London, much of it healthy and pure, much more of it decadent. . . . London, according to Shelley, is a garden ravaged : bricks and stones and much wickedness have been built upon it, but beneath it all is good Mother Earth. She has made a garden at the bottom of Kingsway, she responds nobly to the appeals made to her in Kensington Gardens and the Park, and St. James's Park, and the squares : she is allowed to do her best for everything but human beings, and they are tricked and victimised, exploited at every turn—by other human beings. . . . Until the invention of the printing-press there was no help for it, there was nothing to lighten our darkness. The printing-press has done much to obscure it and

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make it darker than ever, but every now and then there are people, living opposite rows of lodging-houses packed with children, who come to the conclusion that it is no more to be endured, and set out to pick locks with their pens.

That has happened to me, and, as luck would have it, at the very first cast I hooked my fish.

I took down a map of London and was appalled at the magnitude of the task I had undertaken. It was quite an ordinary map, with the Thames coloured blue and the squares pale green, the railways thick black lines, and all the streets taking the most unexpected curves. It was a shock to my vanity. Like ninety Londoners in a hundred, I had plumed myself on my knowledge of London, and here I found names totally unfamiliar—Homerton, Hoxton, Brentford, Stratford—or known only through literary associations or the omnibuses. London, for practical purposes, had been to me: Kensington, Belgravia, Bayswater, Bloomsbury. The City and the West End existed for business and pleasure, and I had only a very small idea of the millions of lives being lived quite amusingly in the suburbs, or in the yellow waste south of the river. . . . Somehow, my revolution did not seem quite so easy a matter as it did.

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Seven millions ! And the majority living in comparatively ugly houses ! And here was I calmly proposing to attack them all, bundle them out of their houses and habits of living and persuade them to amend their ways and their dwellings. . . .

I was humbled ! “ Surely,” I said, as I restored the map to the shelf, “ there will be one or two who will understand and sympathise, one or two who will be glad to know me, and will not turn me from their doors ! ”

For you must know that the rôle of revolutionary was so new to me that with my friends I should have been diffident and self-conscious about it.

Armed with my pen I set out, and determined to begin my search in the region of Kensington Gardens, partly because I hoped that I might find a young couple who had started in life in that region with a view to possibilities. . . . Like Napoleon, I have a star and believe in it. I picked it out and followed it until it was hidden behind a row of houses, determined, should I see it again at the next corner, to turn. Sure enough, at the next corner I saw my star shining in the very middle of the street. On one side of it was a row of houses, very like my lodging-houses, surly, sulky, and forbidding. On the other side—just a shade

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nearer my star—was the most absurd little row of houses ever seen : three windows and a door to each, no more. They had silly little gardens and imposing flights of steps. There were five of them, stumpy, sturdy, obstinate-looking little houses. Three were dirty and shabby, two were clean and newly painted. It seemed impossible that more than two people could live in them. In the cleanest and most newly painted, it seemed likely that the newest of newly married people could dwell. It was all so fresh, so gallant, so hopeful, so shy, and yet so defiantly gay, that I could have no doubt about it. On its little gate it had a new enamelled plate, on which was written—as I am prepared to swear :

No Hawkers
No Circulars
No Relations
No Callers.

That gave me to pause. I was neither hawker, circular, nor caller—a sort of burglar in search of sympathy. Real materialistic burglars, I believe, have a sort of tacit convention not to disturb the newly married ; but, when I thought it over, it seemed to me that here, if anywhere, I should find sympathy with my anti-lodging-house crusade.

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I pushed open the gate, breathed a prayer to my star, walked up the steps, and plunged my pen into the keyhole.

The door swung open, and I walked out of my Preface into my book. . . .

I

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*“ All dear Nature’s children sweet
Lie ’fore bride and bridegroom’s feet,
 Blessing their sense !
Not an angel of the air,
Bird melodious or bird fair,
 Be absent hence ! ”*

SHAKESPEARE.

I

Mr. and Mrs. Robin

THE passage from the front-door to the drawing-room can hardly have been three feet wide. Only a very small maid could have screwed herself up tight enough to allow a visitor to pass. . . .

I closed the door noiselessly, and was rather surprised to find a light suddenly turned on and a very, very pretty girl greeting me warmly. She said :

“ I knew you would come to-night.”

I felt very guilty, and replied :

“ Indeed ! ”

“ Yes,” she said. “ We have been quarrelling because I wanted to have mauve tulle over my red cushions, and Robin said I couldn’t possibly. I can, can’t I ? ”

“ You can, certainly. But I didn’t know I was an acknowledged authority, except to myself.”

“ Come in at once and persuade Robin.”

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The passage was all white, with coarse canvas stretched over the walls and distempered. There was no colour in the hall, but a long mauve silk curtain hung at the bend of the passage to conceal the lower regions. It was lit by an electric bulb inside a carved marble bowl hung close to the ceiling. I was a little astonished to see in the hall—or, rather, in the passage—what I had taken to be a contrivance of my own: two shelves, painted white, one above the other, a foot wide, the top for visitors' hats, cards, etc., and the lower for the coats of the household, both letting down to permit of the passage of luggage and people more than two feet wide. However, I made no remark, and allowed the girl to conduct me into the drawing-room. Here I was greeted with the same unconcern by a young gentleman who may have been anything between sixteen and thirty-one. He was tall, very solemn, and he had large wistful blue eyes, which seemed to care to gaze on nothing except the pretty girl. They were both so young, so absurdly, pathetically young, that I began to think I must have passed into some dream-country, perhaps into the region of M. Maeterlinck's Unborn Children, and I began to look about for Father Time, and to be fearful that he would come in and order them, or—worse, far worse—one of them, to

Mr. and Mrs. Robin

take ship in the great galley that plies between their world and ours. But no; the pretty girl presented me with an air of shy defiance to "my husband."

It seems that they knew me quite well, had seen me walking in Kensington Gardens, and more than that, were perfectly well acquainted with the inside of my house.

They were, they told me, frequent visitors at the close-packed house, and one of the children was a relation of theirs. . . . Now, this child was both lucky and something of a personality, and she always managed to be near the door when it opened, and on more than one occasion I had befriended her and taken her in. Her name was Dempsey, and theirs it appeared was Mr. and Mrs. Robin Robin. Dempsey regarded her visits to my house as excursions into Paradise, far too precious to be retailed to the other children, and when she was bursting with it, and could hold in no longer, she confided in the Robins, binding them by the strictest vows not to breathe a word to a soul. . . . And Dempsey, being an Irish child, with a swift, darting intuition, had divined what was in my mind, and had imparted it to them. And Dempsey, being an Irish child, had been able to conspire with my star to bring me to their house. How she did

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it I do not know. I have forgotten how I used to do these things as a child ; but there was no disputing the fact. I had committed an audacious burglary, and had been received most charmingly by my victims.

As one woman to another, I should dearly have loved to sit with Mrs. Robin and discuss kitchens, and fashions, and servants, and the best equipment of a nursery, but the presence of Mr. Robin was an embarrassment, and it seemed likely that we should have to take our topic from him. He was very gracious and did occasionally take his eyes from Mrs. Robin to look with a smile at me. I was feeling very, very old, and wondering if ever in my life I had been young enough to find the world all golden, as it most obviously was to these young people. They were very nice about it, and did not in any way regard me as a gross intruder.

“How long,” said Mr. Robin, “do you think we have been married ?”

At a venture, I replied : “Six months.”

“Four weeks,” said Mr. Robin ; “and we’ve forgotten that we were ever anything else.”

“That’s right !” said I ; and we all giggled like children. That broke down all remaining reserve, and I explained to them exactly what sort of

Mr. and Mrs. Robin

burglar I was, and what fun it was to have come in on them just at the very beginning of their career. Then we talked about Dempsey, and very soon I had them talking about themselves. . . .

She had a large family who were very unkind and jeered at Robin, and he had an uncle who. . . . In short, they got married, and were in disgrace, and nobody would speak to them, except Dempsey, who understood all about it, and defied authority. They had one hundred and ten pounds a year and what he could make by reviewing books and walking up and down Fleet Street, and occasionally talking to an editor on the telephone in the grocer's shop round the corner.

They had, in fact, "done it," and they didn't care, and the world would one day come to its senses and say :

"Who are these brilliant and wonderful people ?
. . . Can it be ? . . . No ! . . . Yes ! . . . It is !
. . . It is !"

"Meanwhile," I said, "you have to live and take what you can get, and pay your way as best you can."

At that Mr. Robin looked very stern and grim, and declared that he would fight to the last gasp.

"The world," said I, "never lets you do that."

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As soon as it realises that you really mean it, and aren't just doing it out of vanity, it makes room for you. It's quite big enough for everybody. . . . I like your room."

This I said because it was clear that Mr. Robin was on the brink of an outburst, and, knowing the weakness of literary people for that sort of thing, I nipped it in the bud, and switched him off indignation into pride in his wife's achievement, which was considerable. They had taken the house from the half-quarter, and she had spent many secret days in its preparation. Its previous inhabitants had been two genteel ladies who had not let lodgings, but had been willing to oblige with a bed now and then. They had never had the house thoroughly cleaned and repaired, and when Mrs. Robin first entered it she had instinctively revolted. Her revolt took shape in action, and she staggered the surveyor by ordering him to paint it all white.

"White!" muttered the surveyor.

"Yes," said Mrs. Robin. "White, white, white, from roof to basement."

Nothing else, she explained, could restore the temper of the house or raise it from the depths of gloom into which it had sunk in its decayed gentility.

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“ It’s very unusual,” said the surveyor.

“ It is, and looks clean,” retorted Mrs. Robin ;
and she had her way.

I approved.

For a small London house nothing can be better than white walls and woodwork, and Mrs. Robin had gone one better and had ordered coarse canvas to be stretched on the walls and whitened with washable distemper. Whether it would actually wash she did not know, but, if it would not, it was a comparatively simple matter to buy more distemper and lay it on herself, when dust and dirt had gathered too thickly. She was a practical young woman, this—a young woman entirely after my own heart.

White walls are an admirable background for colouring, and she was very proud of a black chair which she had made out of an old wreck bought for six shillings, and covered with her grandmother’s best old *moiré antique* silk skirt. The brown legs of the chair had been painted black by Mr. Robin, who in this, as in most other matters, was her slave and did exactly as she bid. He was bursting to display his own achievements in house decoration, but he was polite enough to leave her to act as guide.

Their silly little house consisted of kitchen and

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servant's bedroom in the basement ; two rooms thrown into one, with folding doors, on the ground floor ; bath-room, half-way up the stairs, and their room on the first floor, and behind it Robin's study. This was also his dressing-room, which privilege it shared with the landing and the bath-room. That was all : quite enough for them to start life in. It was so small that they felt safe in it. With themselves, and a maid in proportion to the house, and a dog out of all proportion, they could fill it so full of love and happiness that envy and rancour and rapacity and all other horrid things could find no corner in which to lurk.

So they said, and so most sincerely they thought. They entirely agreed with me that all houses ought to be happy and bright and gay, so that no one ever going into them should be depressed or sorry they had called. And such a house, in fact, had my little Mrs. Robin made. She had only the daintiest furniture, and she had most skilfully economised the small space at her disposal. The furniture had still the air of living in unaccustomed surroundings. Much of it, it appears, she had inherited from an aunt, and had written for it after they had "done it."

With the extraordinary cruelty of offended

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parents, it had been sent, without a word, only the day before they had taken possession, and she had not yet discovered how to dispose of it so that she and it might not get in each other's way or jar upon each other's feelings.

The red silk cushions had been part of the legacy, and, having altered them to the fashionable round shape, she was now busy getting them to fit in with her scheme of colour. The curtains were mauve, and her idea was to cover the red with mauve chiffon, using some old motor veils for the purpose. Robin had jeered at this, and I was just in time to dispel their first shadow of disagreement. I was firm, and sent her upstairs to fetch the veils, and, when she was gone, told Robin that I thought I could help him in the way of work.

"Dempsey said you were a fairy godmother."

"I'm a fairy burglar," I replied; and when Mrs. Robin returned we were laughing.

At once we set to work to make the cushions, for I believe in inspirational sewing, and making things while the idea and enthusiasm are warm, and we were so engrossed that we talked very little. I was able, therefore, to take careful mental notes of the room.

Mrs. Robin had been inspired by Dempsey to

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copy my fireplace : small white tiles built flat against the wall, a grate of three steel bars and a grating at the bottom built in and raised four inches above the ground, a hearth and curb of white tiles, a mantelshelf of half-inch wood, shaped with a curve outwards into the room, and white rounded pillars, perfectly plain, on either side. On the hearth stood an old brass muffin holder of the sort that you can buy in any old furniture shop in the King's Road, Chelsea, or one of the little courts off Holborn. Above the fireplace she had done a very audacious thing (and I like audacity). She had bought a piece of Lincrusta frieze with a pattern of grapes. These grapes she had cut out, leaves and stalks included, and festooned them along the wall. She had put them up with paste and distempered them herself, and it is to be feared she spent (or wasted) much time admiring them. She said that they exercised such a powerful fascination over Robin that he had not been able to do any work, but kept hopping up and down the stairs to look at them. Robin denied this, but somewhat faintly, and there was a glow of pride in his wistful eyes, and certainly the festoon of grapes was the exactly right finishing touch to the room.

The testamentary aunt seemed to have had

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a pretty taste in furniture, for three-parts of it were of a placeable period. By the side of the fireplace was a little green sofa, like that on which Madame Récamier sat for David, an admirable foil to the black chair on the other side with its Victorian memories wrapped up in Mrs. Robin's grandmother's old silk gown. A Sheraton table stood in one recess, and a very charming desk of mahogany inlaid with rosewood in the other. It struck me as being an expensive piece, and I suppose I must have looked reproach, for Mrs. Robin hastened to explain that she had seen it sitting on the pavement outside a dirty shop in the Fulham Road, where it looked so lonely and wretched that she took pity on it, cheapened it, and bought it for a smile and a song. Cleaning and repairing it had been a little expensive, but it was so exactly right and Robinish, that it was well worth it. That and the china cupboard in the dining-room had been her one extravagance. Everything else had come out of her legacy, which had included two trunks of silks, chintzes, brocades and stuffs collected by the aunt, who had the instincts of a magpie, and, in the closing years of her life, had succumbed to a mania for buying large quantities of things for which she had no use or possibility of use.

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Robin was sitting in the black chair, lolling like all literary people ; Mrs. Robin was sitting like Madame Récamier on the little settee ; while I had sunk back into a low sofa with a high back of satinwood inlaid with a broad band of mahogany. This, I learned, had been made for her own little room at home out of a great heavy table with wide leaves which let down, one on each side. She had done this in the teeth of violent opposition on the part of her parents, who regarded it as destruction. The table must have been very ugly, whereas the sofa was charmingly pretty and unique, very comfortable and ideal for two people. The Robins loved it, but, as a rule, were not allowed to sit in it by their cat, who had appropriated it for his own.

On the walls they had bright Japanese prints in narrow black frames which had been in Robin's old rooms in the Temple. (He had a brother in China who delighted his family and friends with ivories and silks and Japanese prints and silver dragon cigarette boxes and cases.) The floor was black, painted by Robin himself with Japan black and turpentine, and afterwards beeswaxed. . . . He had done every floor in the house, and was prouder of it than if he had written "Hamlet" or "Diana of the Crossways."

Mr. and Mrs. Robin

They had a few books on a little shelf by the fireplace ; a blue calf Jane Austen in ten volumes, "Don Quixote," "The Playboy of the Western World," Romain Rolland's "Vie de Beethoven," and, to be quite up to date, Bergson's "Evolution Créatrice," which neither of them had read. As Robin said (and I sympathised with him), he could never read books which were the subject of a cult until the worshippers of success had done with it and passed on to a new idol. Then he could come to it with a clear mind unclouded by irritation.

It was very easy to see that Mr. Robin was one of those who would rather be the hunted hare than one of the pack of hounds. It was not that he hated the majority so much as that he could not bear to take any of his opinions second-hand, or to have thought or artistic feeling soiled by insincerity. He had married exactly the right sort of wife, for she was most transparently direct, simple and sincere. She was quick to make up her mind and quick to act on it. When I looked at the two of them, I had no fears. They would enjoy success and failure equally, take it all as jolly fun, and establish themselves in the sight of the world without that surrender which would make them ashamed to look each other in the face.

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"After all," I said, scarcely knowing that I was thinking aloud, "the majority of the people of England marry on thirty shillings a week or less. Most of them have no prospects, and hardly any of them have a legacy of furniture from their aunts."

"Not every man," said Robin, "has such a wife."

Mrs. Robin transposed the statement and threw it back on him with a look of tenderness and understanding.

By that time I had finished my cushion, and Mrs. Robin made haste to finish hers, and we placed them in position and vowed the effect was quite perfect. Robin was recalcitrant and declared that he liked the red as he liked a discord now and then in Elgar's music.

They had no piano!

"Can't afford it," said Robin.

"You shall come whenever you like and play on mine."

It only needed the discovery of the bond of music to make us feel that we were going to be friends for ever and ever.

They dined at the other end of the room through the folding doors. They had a modern oval gate-legged table of doctored oak—such tables always look well and cost no more than an ordinary square

Mr. and Mrs. Robin

or oblong creation of Tottenham Court Road—and the chairs were old cottage Chippendale, I think—covered with a riotously gay chintz from the testamentary aunt's collection. Mauve curtains again, with white silk casement blinds, and round the wall near the table, which was arranged across the corner of the room, was a band of chintz, to prevent the chairs scratching the wall; and above it hung a row of Rackham pictures taken from one of the colour books. A little convex mirror above the table gave a charming picture of the whole room, and an old Italian mirror hung over the fireplace. To the right of this was Mrs. Robin's great extravagance—the china cupboard. This was painted white, and had doors of square lattice fitted with glass panes, and, somehow, it took my thoughts right away from London into the country—into a cottage garden where a golden-haired girl leaned out of her low casement window and shyly took her bumpkin lover's present of three rosy apples as round and rosy as her cheeks. As an excuse for this extravagance, Mrs. Robin explained to me that, by taking out two screws, the whole of the cupboard could be removed, without damage to the wall, so that when the necessity came for a larger house, it could also find a home there.

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The windows of the dining-room looked out on to a little patch of garden, where grew three trees and a laurel bush, and at the end of the garden was a blank wall.

“That,” said Robin, “is our future.”

“Exactly,” said I; “you can write on it what you will, or you can cover it with lovely climbing plants. Grow a bean-stalk and climb up it like the famous Jack.”

“But,” Mrs. Robin protested, “that was a fairy bean-stalk.”

“And I, if you please, am a sort of fairy.”

Mr. Robin became violently agitated, said that I had given him an idea for a two-guinea article, and disappeared. I drew Mrs. Robin to my side, and said :

“That, dear child, is the bean-stalk. You must see that he works, and don’t let him ever begin to think that his work, or the money he may make by it, or the fame which may be his reward, are of greater importance than you. Your life is his, and his is yours, and if you suffer them to grow apart you will neither of you really be alive. Nature says to every one of us : ‘ Will you have your life living or dead ? ’ Love is life.”

“I know,” said Mrs. Robin, and she put her two hands on my shoulders and kissed me.

Mr. and Mrs. Robin

“Dempsey said you would understand, and you do.”

Nothing has ever pleased me so much as that saying. It touched me, and to save the situation I rejoined :

“Now show me the kitchen.”

II

The Little Maid

“Lucy . . . lost the omen at her heart as she glanced at the title of the volume. It was Dr. Kitchener on Domestic Cookery.”

RICHARD FEVEREL.

II

The Little Maid

It will be remembered that Noddy Boffin had one half of the room as a kitchen, while in the other half his spouse dwelt in the grandeur of a parlour. My sympathies are with Noddy. There is no room in a house so delightful as a kitchen, no day in the week so full of pleasure as Sunday, when the maids go out and the mistress may prowl and brew and grill to her heart's content. The days are gone when housewives baked at home, and there must be very few houses indeed where even jam is made in the kitchen. The great laundries, happily, have banished the nightmare of a washing-day. Not many women can be without a faded instinct stirring in them which drives them to take pleasure in household things, and with their own hands to make and bake, and boil and broil, and stew. And even if that instinct be dead, there is the pleasure of being on ground forbidden six

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days in the week, the joy of handling unfamiliar instruments.

Mrs. Robin told me she enjoyed nothing in the preparation of her house so much as buying pots and pans and kitchen utensils. Worlds unknown were unfolded before her, and, considering what a large part in our existence is played by food, and how much time is given up to its consumption, she felt ashamed of her ignorance. She drew up a scheme on paper, and when she reached the Stores found that she had omitted half the essential items. She had elaborate lists of all the pleasant things like spice tins and shining dish-covers, and pretty glass and china, but all the necessary meaner utensils had escaped her. However, the young man in the frock-coat took charge of her with an interest quite fatherly, and, with a patience altogether remarkable in one so young, saw to it that nothing was forgotten. His knowledge of a kitchen was encyclopædic and practical ; his advice was only vitiated by a desire, very proper in a salesman, to "push" certain articles and induce her to buy all sorts of patent devices and powders and polishes and cleaners. He annoyed her by calling her "Miss," and at last she said very loud and clear that she was Mrs. Robin, and then he called her

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“Madam,” the novelty of which so tickled her that she fell to counting how often he would use the word, and in ten minutes he used it thirty-three times. In the end she grew so fond of him that she led him on to tell her all about his mother, whom he was supporting, and his fiancée, whom he hoped to be able to support in ten years or so—of so little value is an encyclopædic and practical knowledge of kitchens in the labour market! She was so sorry for him that she was on the point of asking him to dinner, when she reflected that his ideas and her Robin’s were likely to clash. She wished him every happiness, and they parted, she to find that she had spent four pounds more than she had intended or could afford.

She told me all this as we were inspecting the scullery, which contained a gas-stove and a pantry, and a shy little maid who stood bobbing awkward little curtsies until we had removed away from the door, when she darted through it and down to her own subterranean regions. Mrs. Robin confessed that she and the little maid were as yet mortally shy of each other, and could only bring themselves to speak just enough to secure the proper conduct of the house.

“At any rate,” I said, “you have given her

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a scullery in a thousand : there is a place for everything."

To this she explained that she had been in the house for some days all by herself before the little maid arrived, and had learned by experience where things could most conveniently go. The previous maiden ladies had been too genteel to be practical, and they had muddled along with a plentiful lack of shelves and hooks.

No pantry !

Practical Mrs. Robin had had a cupboard built over the copper, with large, deep shelves, to accommodate her china and glass. On one side of the sink—of course, built 9 inches too low—a table was fixed, with a shelf beneath it for pans, and there was a miniature dresser above it for plates and cups and saucers. From the plate-rack hung the saucepan brush, the mop, and the dish-cloth, each from a separate hook. Between the pantry and the gas-stove two more shelves were let in, and on the other side of the stove were other two. Most of the cooking was done in the scullery, and it was therefore essential that it should be neat and tidy, well ordered, and disciplined. Mrs. Robin's triumph lay in the fact that all her ingenuity had been of very little expense, for the greater part of her shelves

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had been made of the wood found in the garden in a fence erected by the maiden ladies to hide the vulgar aspect of the next-door neighbour's washing. Of the two the sombre solid fence was the more offensive, and away it came at once.

In the lightness of their hearts, Mr. and Mrs. Robin had arranged between themselves to have their little garden enclosed by a green trellis. None of your ordinary diagonal trellises, but a square trellis worthy to be placed upon the walls of Kensington Palace or a house in Queen Anne's Gate. They ordered it.

Four pounds.

Could they afford it ?

They could not.

One day they decided that they must countermand it. The next they were hopeful and felt sure that wealth must soon pour in. The next the trellis seemed to bring ruin upon them. Finally, they made up their minds to do without it until more prosperous days, and Lucy—I can't call her "Mrs. Robin" any longer—had just taken pen in hand to write to her little jobbing carpenter, when he appeared—Mr. Doy, *se ipse*—with his uncouth assistant, and his handbarrow piled high with apple-green trellis all

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ready to be fitted. He went through the work with his usual funereal solemnity. The uncouth assistant painted it, whistling "In the Shadows," out of tune, without ever stopping for three hours and a half; and when it was done, Mr. Doy came to Lucy and assured her that there was nothing like it for keeping out the cats.

(On the contrary, all day and all night the innumerable cats of the neighbourhood use it as an amusing toy-ladder and gymnastic apparatus.)

The trellis and the acquaintance of Mr. Doy were well worth the four pounds, and he assured a friend of mine, for whom he also works, that it was a rare pleasure to do jobs for Mrs. Robin — "She does know exactly what she wants."

Lucy's is not the perfect kitchen; but before she has done she is determined that she will have the plu-perfect kitchen with white-tiled walls and ceiling, and everything gleaming and aglow with polished brass and copper and aluminium, and a comfortable cook, and neat "tweeny" in blue linen, and a fat half-Persian cat, all simple and sweet.

This, her first kitchen, is inclined to darkness, being half below the ground level, with its

The Little Maid

only window at the bottom of a well ; although, compared with some in much bigger houses, it is sunlight itself. Its predominant note is apple-green, and the walls are white varnished paper picked out with a light green pattern ; and truly she could not have done much better. The room must have been dolefully unpromising material for her indomitable activity. What she could, she did. The frock-coated young man at the Stores gave her a thorough equipment, and she rose triumphant above the difficulty of finding room for everything. She made a brush cupboard on one side of the fireplace, and a general cupboard already existed on the other. Nothing had given her greater pleasure than the purchase of a dozen blue-enamelled canisters for tea, rice, sugar, etc. These she ranged in rows on a little bookcase which was hung by the window so that the light could fall on their surface. This contrivance also had the practical advantage that it deprived the maid of all excuse for having the general cupboard in a litter of crumpled bags, lidless tins, corkless bottles, etc. No doubt the general cupboard would periodically suffer the process of degeneration and become a litter, but the enamelled canisters would obviate the worst elements of such disasters. The floor had been

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blackened by Mr. Robin during the time of his indomitable exploits with the brush, and it was relieved of bareness by a strip of brown felt.

The dresser was covered with white American cloth, which was also used in all the cupboards and drawers.

I could see that Lucy was unhappy about her kitchen. It fell so far short of her ideal and dream of white tiles, and yet I felt powerless to say anything that could reassure her. There are these hopeless patches even in the brightest dreams, even in the most splendid of realities.

She said :

“ It ought to be all different.”

“ My dear, it can't be. It is as good as it can be.”

“ But it isn't——”

“ I know it isn't. But ask the little maid what sort of a kitchen she came from.”

“ I will,” said Lucy, and with that she led me into the little maid's room next door. The little maid, who had really the elements of prettiness when you came to look at her more closely, was none other than the daughter of Mr. Doy.

Miss Doy. She stands fully introduced. Seven-

The Little Maid

teen, undeveloped, open, frank, with a jaw that expressed character, though with nothing but her foolish elementary school education and her hard experience in the rough and tumble of the teeming streets of Paddington to tell her the why and wherefore of her being and how and to what end she was Miss Doy. She accepted her promotion to cleanliness and peace and privacy without question and without bewilderment, feeling nothing so acutely as the absence of her young brother and sisters. She came halfway down in a family of twelve, born of two mothers. She had never been in service before, and I asked her how she fared.

“Well, ’m, as you might say, fairly, thank you.”

“And you like your kitchen?”

“It’s fair grand.”

“What was your kitchen at home like?”

She seemed to suspect some ulterior motive, and probably had memories of Charity Organisation Inspectors, for she glanced furtively at her mistress and gave a little nervous giggle before she replied, with sudden volubility:

“Well, ’m, as you might say, there was a kid here and a kid there, and a bit of bacon on the table, and father’s dinner cookin’, and Billy

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readin' the 'Ha'penny Marvel,' and the coals and the coke all anywheres, and mother talkin' to the next-door neighbour through the window, and such a noise you couldn't hear yourself think if you'd wanted to."

She gasped, stopped short, gave a furtive glance at Lucy, and said :

"I 'ope I 'aven't been too free, 'm."

"Thank you ; I'm glad you like it."

Miss Doy regained confidence :

"She does make things pretty. It was a knock-out for mother when she came and see me living in a boodore."

And, indeed, "boudoir" would not have been an inappropriate word for it, for Lucy had given her freely of the contents of her aunt's trunks. She had a neat square of carpet on the floor, white silk curtains, Hollyer photographs of Burne-Jones pictures on the walls, a pretty rose-bud paper, and the whole room seemed only to differ from the rest of the house in that it was lit by gas instead of electricity. There was nothing ugly in it except Miss Doy's yellow tin box.

We left Miss Doy and returned to the drawing-room.

"Why did you do that ?" I asked.

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Lucy knew that I was referring to the little maid's room.

"The servants' rooms at home were horrible," she said, and then, with sudden emphasis and feeling, she added: "I think we ought to make them hate the houses they come from. Think of that kitchen she described."

"At least she described it well. Miss Doy has powers of imagination and observation, which is more than can be said for many people whose lives have been smooth and fat and comfortable from the first moment."

"That's true. And I'm glad I made the room pretty, because I like her."

Truly there never was such a successful burglary, nor ever did revolutionary so readily find a disciple who with fervour and clear-sightedness and purity of feeling could exactly express the spirit of the longed-for reform. Here, in fine, was my dear little Mrs. Robin doing for Miss Doy what I, with great effrontery and only partial grasp of the mightiness of the undertaking, had set out to do for millions of people. She was giving her the opportunity in day-to-day experience and habit of living to prefer the higher to the lower, sweetness and light to coarseness and rasping, slipshod ways and waste.

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It has been well said that "in the allurements of all the senses to the service of impassioned thought lies the secret of the noblest art." Taken in conjunction with Miss Doy, the words sound grotesque. But no one ever hoped that the Miss Doyes of this world would become artists or rise to impassioned thought. The highest hope and the goal of all endeavour is that, when it comes to the little maid's turn, she may have imbibed enough right feeling and sensitiveness and self-respect to be able to make of her own home a better thing than that in which she grew up. That does not seem to be a matter of great difficulty, and only appears hopeless when we are haunted by the vast number of Miss Doyes in the world. Yet I can find comfort—opportunity, if you will—in the thought that there are thousands of little Mrs. Robins, all happily and courageously beginning life, even as she, and, even as she, all in possession of love and kindness enough to realise that happiness is infectious and a thousand thousand times more potent in its power for good than misery and selfishness in their power for evil.

With that we returned to our cushions. Lucy thinks they need a finishing touch. They are round cushions—red silk originally—that we

The Little Maid

covered with purple net, and that again with purple chiffon. She has the very thing. She goes upstairs, and appears in a moment with an old cloak trimmed with lace and roses of silver. Her first thought had been to use the lace, but the roses are apt. Scissors are whipped out, and in a trice we have them sewn on—one little silver rose and a few leaves on each round cushion at the central gathering.

“Just what was wanted!” cried Lucy.

I rejoice in her happiness, and we fall to discussing Robin, and what we said and thought is neither here nor there, except that we conspired to turn his gifts to account, which, left to himself, he never would have done. For Lucy's sake I was prepared to go any lengths to persuade the world to find him work which should both provide him with a livelihood and develop his faculties. I asked how old they were.

He was twenty-three.

She was twenty-two.

I felt immeasurably old, until I realised that I was supremely glad that my nefarious entry into their little house had given me what I most sorely needed—other lives to live in, other joys and sorrows to share, the opportunity in maturity

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of once more approaching life and seeing all its changes with the eyes of understanding—taking from them the joy of new experience, giving them the benefit and help, if help it can be, of experience won through.

III

Nearer Heaven

*“And he dreamed, and, behold, a ladder set up
on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven . . .”*

GENESIS XXVIII.

III

Nearer Heaven

I DO NOT know of any tolerably eloquent passage in literature dealing with stairs. Jacob's dream of the ladder contains more of their inherent poetry than any other passage contained in my reading—extensive, but, like that of most active persons, desultory. My inspirations and conversions come, like that of Saul on the road to Damascus, in flashes or not at all. Addison and Lamb may have touched a flight of stairs with their wings; but, if so, I remember it not, and they cannot have said anything finer than the author of Genesis:

“Behold, the angels of God ascending and descending on it.”

There were angels ascending and descending on the Robins' narrow flight of stairs—seven steps to the bath-room and eight steps up to the study and bedrooms. The angels were silent when I

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first ventured up the stairs, for the bride and bridegroom were away, and they were busy weaving stars into the carpet against their return. I could hear the fluttering of their wings, and the silvery laugh of a baby angel who had only just emerged from the tear-drop in which he had made his first appearance on this planet. You remember :

*“Every tear in every eye
Becomes a babe in eternity.”*

A sort of modesty had forbidden my making any attempt to visit the upper regions of the tiny house in the presence of my little friends. It is in the upper regions of a house that life is most human and most sacred, or, in the obverse, most inhuman and blasphemous. There, if anywhere, we discard the superficial self we assume for the conduct of our everyday affairs, and contact with persons who are insignificant and outside our capacity for friendship. There we think our most intimate thoughts and turn to our deepest feelings. There we come face to face with ourselves, or, if we have been so cowardly and selfish in our dealings with mankind that we dare not let the outer and the inner meet, we push forward a smirking egoism, gaze at ourselves in flattering moral mirrors, and pile up a

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heap of misery which will one day fall and crush us flat. Where true love is, there egoism is not, and, because I knew that in this house I should light upon the fairest things, the sweetest thoughts, the tenderest and finest emotions in the world, I forbore, and waited until some time when I could visit the upper rooms alone and, without being too much influenced by the atmosphere of joy, take stock as coldly as a surveyor's apprentice of what things I should find there.

By pulling a wire here and smiling upon an important journalist there, I had contrived to install my Robin as dramatic critic on a struggling halfpenny newspaper. He detested its politics, swallowed his scruples, and for the ridiculously small sum of four pounds a week pledged himself to visit all entertainments for which the managers thereof sent tickets to the office in Blackfriars. On an average, his duties occupied two evenings a week, and, though he groaned considerably, he was glad of the regular activity, and took it all very seriously, much to the amazement of his colleagues and sometimes to the dismay of the theatrical managers. Domestically, it had this advantage for the Robins, that in their rather friendless condition it took them out into the world and made them realise more clearly what

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exactly they had to face, and the unpleasant truth that love is not a solvent of the practical and commercial difficulties of life.

Lucy would often accompany her Robin, and it was on one of these evenings that I made my way into their little house and marched straight upstairs.

In only too many houses the upper rooms are sacrificed to the lower, the object being to impress visitors rather than to secure general well-being. In innumerable houses the first flight of stairs presents an opulent and comfortable aspect, while those above are beggarly and repelling.

Lucy's stairs were white with a purple carpet. The walls were white and hung with gay pictures, all in black frames. From the seventh step—where the stairs turned—one step led down to the bath-room. And here is the place for a vigorous expression of opinion.

The bath-room is, in many respects, the most important room in a house.

In the bath-room the life of the day is begun, and day is broken off from night and from the day before. Whether the bath is hot or cold, the person who steps into it is not the person who steps out of it. Very probably King David was not over-clean, but he did, in moments of

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poetical inspiration, come near the truth, and there is no greater lyric praise of the spiritual virtue of the bath than this :

“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean ; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”

The bath-room should be the housewife's first care. I know only too many houses in which the bath-room is regarded as a sort of shameful, but necessary adjunct : a blotched, painted bath ; woodwork stained and peeled of its paint by soap, no proper shelves, a nightmare of tooth-brushes and ragged loofahs.

The perfect bath-room is all tiles, with a marble bath let down into the floor. There is no reason why the bath should not always be at least half-way beneath the floor, with a step up to it, giving the impression that it is entirely beneath. There is so much space left between the floor and the ceiling of the room underneath which could be utilised in this way. In Mrs. Robin's house the bath was fixed in the usual way, and her means did not allow her to achieve anything better, but within her limitations she had what was almost perfection.

The floor was covered with white cork carpet. The porcelain bath and the geyser occupied the full length of the little room and half its width.

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The lavatory basin filled the only available corner. Above this there was a glass shelf full of neat and pretty bottles to hold all the usual toilet necessities. Between the basin and the bath was another shelf of about 18 inches square, covered with glass over a piece of gay-coloured chintz, on which rested the sponges in a pretty leadless glaze bowl. The only other furniture was a little white table, also covered with glass over chintz. On this was another basin of leadless glaze, with its gay flowers, holding a gigantic sponge, surely the biggest ever brought up from the depths of the sea by an Indian diver. This—unless it was a pure piece of bluff—seemed to betoken a zest for bathing in Mr. Robin, the neophyte dramatic critic. It was no bluff, and I have since learned that he is a hydro-maniac, and writes of nothing so keenly or enthusiastically as the rivers of England and their respective merits from the point of view of the swimmer. A Cambridge man, he has a sentimental fondness for the sheds below Grantchester, but of all places he most loves the Thames above Oxford, far above Port Meadow, or a certain Dead Man's Pool in Westmorland. In the matter of bathing in a house in a 6-foot bath he is an expert, and his remarks and recommendations on the subject are to be had at the

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small cost of the trouble of turning up the files of the *M*—— *L*—— at the British Museum, where also is to be found a more exact and more affectionate description of this particular bath-room than I am able to give you as the result of my stealthy visit.

The walls were covered with a varnished paper of a tile pattern, adorned with heraldic lions and galliots with bellying sails, while the curtains were of a hand-woven creamy white material with a pattern of bright colour all round them, about 2 inches from the hem, the windows being made opaque by a blind of green net hung against the window.

The whole thing left a clean taste in the mouth. Merely to look into the room was to be made “whiter than snow,” and I felt fitted then to ascend the remaining eight stairs to the *sanctum sanctorum* of their bedroom.

The Theosophists say that thought-forms abide in places and constitute the *genius loci*, and when houses change tenants there is a fierce battle in and out of rooms and up and down stairs between the old and the new thought-forms. This accounts for the chaos in so many houses. Here there was no sign of conflict. The thought-forms of the Robins had completely routed and put to flight

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the thought-forms of the genteel maiden-ladies. Gentleness had triumphed over gentility, as the real must always triumph over the artificial. The stars in their courses fight for the real, while the artificial has no backing save that of the second-hand thoughts and feelings of the time, and its artillery is Chinese—guns painted on a wall.

Mr. Robin had the landing—not more than 7 feet square—for his dressing-room, and here stood a splendid old mahogany chest of drawers, wherein Mrs. Robin had the art and secret of packing half a household. Over it hung a neat Chippendale mirror, and the hand of Mrs. Robin was seen in the arrangement of Robin's brushes, etc. His dress ties were neatly packed in a little oak box, a contrivance, I am sure, which must have been a revolution in the habits of the young gentleman, and, when I gazed at the neatness, all remaining qualms I might have had as to their prospects of success in the difficult region of art and letters in London vanished. It was clear that she was strong enough and subtle enough painlessly to sort and tidy up his rather chaotic, though large, stock of ideas and keep the wheels of his brain well oiled.

From that point of view the study was psychologically absorbing : A tiny room, all white. A

Nearer Heaven

portrait of Mrs. Robin on the mantelpiece, another on the desk. To one side of the fireplace a cupboard in which Robin kept his clothes, to the other his books. For a writer, a surprisingly small collection. The majority of his books I remembered he had bought in phases, and he had left his bachelor books behind with his bachelor days. Only a few—and these great—had been vital enough to survive his affair of the heart.

After all, it is the affections that choose the books which are our companions—"the affections under the control of good sense." The brain likes to be tickled, but it must always be tickled in a new way. Brain-tickling books are carried away on the backward stream of time, but those endure which fill the heart and give warmth and fullness of life.

And so there were no ticklers in the library of this newly wedded husband. Shakespeare was there, and Borrow, Montaigne and Meredith, and Synge, Heine, Hardy and John Bunyan, and a tattered copy of the "Sentimental Journey"; many French books, a few German, Turgenev, Tolstoi. Above them on the top shelf was an indescribably heterogeneous litter of review copies of modern novels, amongst which discretion forbids any selective mention.

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There was a certain masculine austerity in the room, bidding the invading Mrs. Robin stay her hand, and there was a sort of comfortable untidiness which must have been distressing to her, though it was to be remarked that she had sifted all important papers from the litter. The unimportant she allowed to remain scattered as a sort of indulgence.

She had her share in the room ; for his sofa, whereon he dreamed his dreams, was an ottoman (bought for £1 at a little old shop bursting with second-hand furniture, round the corner), which served as her linen press.

And now what shall be said of their room ? Here was Lucy in excelsis, Lucy triumphant, Lucy determined that when her eyes opened in the morning they should light on nothing ugly.

They had two ordinary little wooden beds, side by side, but she had made them unordinary by sawing off their wooden ends, which, like all but the most beautiful ends of beds, jutted up incongruously and made the room seem overloaded. An iron bedstead is, in any case, an abomination, and it is beyond redemption in that the disfiguring ends are not removable. Fully nine-tenths of the Anglo-Saxon race, I suppose,

Nearer Heaven

wake up every morning to find themselves faced with a hideous lacquered iron grid, surmounted with gleaming brass knobs to remind them that they were born, must live, and, in all probability, die in a prison. Wellnigh half of a human being's life is spent in bed, and surely it is worth while seeing to it that in shape and design the bedstead does not symbolise all that is cramping and fettering and exasperating in our existence.

Lucy was alive to this, and solved the problem simply by removing the obnoxious ends.

Over the beds she had a narrow white shelf for books and photographs and the electric lamp. A white screen, with panels of bright chintz, protected them from the door, and she was lucky in having a large cupboard on each side of the fireplace. From these cupboards the panels of wood had been removed and square panes of glass put in their place and lined with chintz to match the screen. Her toilet table was neither more nor less than a Chippendale card-table covered with plate glass over mauve silk and what looked like a portion of a sacerdotal robe. Reckless Lucy ! Plate glass is most expensive, and certainly not a luxury for young people who start life in defiance of their parents with an income of £110 a year.

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However, as my burglarious advent had raised their resources to £310 and the possibility of more, she may be permitted her extravagance.

The curtains were chintz, white with mauve, and the bedspreads were made of a piece of beautiful old brocade, grapes and their foliage trailing all over it. The floor was stained black, with one or two mauve rugs lying on it.

One or two charming mirrors and some photographs of Lucy's favourite pictures in narrow black frames adorned the walls, and the toilet table held the most attractive little receptacles for the numerous odds and ends that make up a woman's armoury.

So—I had seen all the house. It was, when all was told, but a playing at houses. For the newly married all life is but a game. Only too soon the outer world breaks into their Eden, demands their services, puts them to the test, and adopts them as fully-grown men and women, or rejects them and sets them to irresponsible work. This was essentially a newly married house. There was no sign that he or she had really settled down to work, or had seriously begun to tackle the business of life. In both there were delightful and seemingly boundless possibilities. The rarest treasure of life was in

Nearer Heaven

their hands ; but it was far, far too soon to begin even to think what they were going to do with it. It possessed them : they were not its masters. It, rather than their personalities, was expressed in every nook and cranny of the house. However, it was certainly the sort of house which I had in my mind when first I set out upon my quest, and there is no quarrel with it save that it gives them no room to expand. It is a perfect little nest for the playtime of married life, perfect for them, for—

He is twenty-three, and

She is twenty-two.

But no mature person can be expected to take a genuine mature interest in a house wherein there is no room for a nursery—

The perfect house for two—happy two.

I had begun well ; their little house is Paradise to Miss Doy.

IV

Dempsey

*"So I set out on my walk to see the wonders of
the big city."*

LAVENGRO.

IV

Dempsey

DEMPSEY and I have been discussing the best sort of house to live in, if you have to live in London, and she is of opinion that the most suitable house for a child and a fairy burglar is the little rambling, ivy-clad cottage in Kensington Gardens on the green slope above the Long Water. Nobody has ever been seen to go in or out of it, and she declares that we might take possession at once, and is not at all abashed when I tell her that we should first have to seek an audience of the King, which, as neither of us has been presented at Court, would be a matter of some difficulty.

She asked if it wouldn't do to leave a card, and I told her that there was a gigantic footman, dressed in nothing but the Royal Arms, whose only business it was to tear up the cards left by ordinary people who have not been presented.

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Buckingham Palace is, of course, out of the question, and we—Dempsey and I: she is now my most loyal ally—would never think of undertaking to furnish a house that has to accommodate thousands of people. There are so many people in Buckingham Palace that when the King goes round at night, to see that everything is locked up, he often meets men and women and children he does not know from Adam.

Dempsey's next choice is the Arsenal in the Park. But the Park belongs to the People, and there is no known method of getting at the People. Even the politicians have long since given that up.

It is all very tantalising. So many of the houses we set our hearts upon are practically unattainable. There is in the Bayswater Road a public-house that could be made the most enchanting house.

Again, on Campden Hill, a long, low building near the waterworks would admirably serve our purpose. That also is a public-house, and I am afraid it would be difficult to persuade the brewers to part with it. There is a certain florist who has a house standing lonely in the garden of a western square. I am envious of him. And there are lodges and gardeners' cottages which I

Dempsey

long to prepare for such little couples as my Robins. However, it is all crying out for the moon, like Dempsey's desire for the house in Kensington Gardens.

No. We shall have to put up with an ordinary landlord, unless we have the luck to take a house from a Duke, or the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, or Eton College, or from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. In the majority of cases between those august personages and institutions and the humble tenant there is a thick-set hedge of leases and sub-leases. Between the People and the Land stands the Law.

Dempsey is not particularly interested in landlords. She wants houses. Almost always when I see her she has a new list of houses-to-let in Kensington and Campden Hill, and very often we make a tour of inspection. It never seemed to occur to her that it might be possible to live anywhere else, and she was apt to take an insular and suspicious view of people who came from other parts. To remedy this, I spent many days in dragging her by tube and train and 'bus as far west as Kew and as far north as Highgate. When I reflect that there were miles and miles of streets unvisited south of the river and east of the Bank my brain reels. I fear that I cannot

Happy Houses

face this monstrous London, and ache to be back in my cottage in the country, which is my true abiding place ; and, but for Dempsey, I think I should fly. A talk with her is almost as refreshing as the country. She lives in a world of her own fantasy, which is in a state of perpetual and painless adjustment to the actual world and her not altogether enviable existence in the close-packed house.

She has no father ; only a mother, a cousin of Robin Robin's, who is a singer, and ranges over the world and comes to London for perhaps a month in the year ; and then she takes a little house in the most fashionable part of London, and Dempsey is squeezed out of the close-packed house, given a mountain of new clothes, and led into the most bewildering circles. The other eleven months she never has so much as a pair of new stockings, and she is left to the care of her mother's old nurse, who keeps the house opposite for Anglo-Indian families. Dempsey is hitched on to one family after another, and is perpetually altering her standards to fit them. And yet the essential Dempsey, the Dempsey that I love, is ever the same. She assimilates the religion and the moral outlook of each family in turn, dominates all the children and makes

Dempsey

their nurses and ayahs like her, though she renders it impossible for them to tyrannise.

*"She has been very good to me.
She is eleven years old."*

Lord Rosebery lives in Berkeley Square, but we do not wish to join him. We spent some time considering the problem and watching the ladies and the gentlemen—and the servants—go in and out of the houses. They looked plump and physically well, but in their eyes was what Dempsey calls the "'fraid-to-know-you" expression.

We don't want large houses.

We want to live with the ordinary people; that is, we want to live with the aristocrats of every class. If we live in Berkeley Square everybody touches his hat to us. We don't like that. We want to shake hands with everybody—that is, everybody who wants to shake hands with us.

We might consider a little house in Charles Street or Curzon Street; but, on the whole, Dempsey would rather not, for it is in such houses that she spends her month in the year with her mother, and she always comes back from that feeling as though she had been locked in the tropical houses at Kew. Personally, I see no

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reason why there should not be happy houses in Mayfair, but Dempsey's experience is too strong, and she is "dead against it."

Well then.

A main thoroughfare is made intolerable by the motor-'buses. The house agents use such strange language that it is impossible to take any of their statements about "residential quarters" or "eligible houses" seriously. In so many streets one might as well live in a deserted and half-buried temple in Egypt—this is especially true of Paddington and Bloomsbury. Some quarters are isolated and far away from tube or 'bus. . . . Well then.

We investigated.

Kew we found admirable for the elderly. What a place for a grandmother to live in, there to be visited on Sundays by her horde of descendants! The retired, the weary, the seeker of peace, those who have fallen out of the ranks, the disappointed, may all live here and enjoy each the sort of happiness that sorts with their tempers and dispositions. . . . To each happiness in his own way; but here happiness is to be considered in mine, a happiness which it is almost impossible to define—a keen and zestful possession of life—life with an edge to it. . . . Kew is for

Dempsey

those whose lives are comfortably settled. . . .
(This with no desire to disparage the excellent inhabitants of Kew.)

There are lovely houses by the river at Hammersmith, but the approach to them is unlovely. Dempsey adores slums, but that, I think, is only because her own superb vitality is kindled to a glow by the sight of so many busy, bustling human beings, and she is not yet old enough to see the tragedy of so much futile activity, the tragedy and the waste. . . . A panther in a cage is active, but the sight of it is intolerable to the eyes of sympathy.

We explored the suburbs, but came to the conclusion that they were a half-and-half affair. Either be in town and in the thick of it, scrambling in the hurly-burly, or live in the country. Of two things, one—either too much humanity or too much Nature.

Dempsey, being a fragment of humanity flung into this world on the high seas—she was born between Rio Janeiro and Lisbon—is singularly free from prejudice, and she states the point rather neatly when she says :

“ I like trees all black or clean.”

The trees in the suburbs never attain the truly urban pitch of blackness which clothes the

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trees in the Gardens and the Parks ; and as with trees so with human minds and souls.

So we dismiss from our survey the majority of the dwellings in Outer London, and concentrate our attention upon the variegated region which lies between Chelsea on the West and Temple Bar on the East, the Thames on the South and Regent's Park on the North ; but even within these limits there is much that Dempsey considers outlandish.

In Chelsea there are many houses we should be only too pleased to touch if we could first transplant them to another region. . . . What a joyous scheme it would be if we could make a little town of all the delightful houses in London and wall them round to shut out the jerry builder and the sordid speculator and the slums ! But we must take our London as we find it ; and all our own favourite houses in Tite Street, and Swan Walk, and Cheyne Walk and Cheyne Row, all the darling little studios in Elm Park and Church Street, must remain there while we pass on, not in snobbishness nor in priggishness, nor in any superior spirit, but because we find the air of Chelsea oppressive and enervating and agueish, and also it lies so far away from the big shops and our own favourite haunts. . . .

Dempsey

Only there is one house in Cheyne Row for which we might face all these disadvantages. It has—but a very prince of babies lives in it, and he would be affronted and royally displeased if his residence were to be held up to the admiration of the groundlings. . . . For the rest, it is sad to leave them; but unless an earthquake will heave Chelsea up to the height of the Albert Memorial we cannot consider the possibility of living there.

East of Chelsea lies Pimlico or Victoria. Winston Churchill lives there, and F. E. Smith, but even these dazzling reputations cannot serve to break the pall of monotony and grim irony that hangs over it. It is a region that has been left behind, screened in from human ways by the railway on the one hand and the river on the other. It contains not a single house of which Dempsey can approve, and therein lies its chief claim to distinction: for the same cannot be said of any other region in London.

Westminster is another affair altogether. From the point of view of houses, the Speaker is *ex officio* the most enviable person in London. He lives in the Houses of Parliament, and all his windows look out on to the river and West-

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minster Bridge; and when every window in a house, at all seasons and all times, is a picture, the rest is easy. There remains only to do nothing to offend the pictures in the windows. . . . The thought of it makes one's mouth water, until we reflect that we are debarred by our sex from ever being Speaker, and Dempsey's chances of marrying a Speaker of the future are, to put it mildly, remote. . . . We console ourselves with Cowley Street and North Street, and Barton Street and Smith Square, and here for the first time Dempsey's allegiance to Kensington is shaken. Here is the most hopeful corner in London, a group of really happy houses rescued from the slums. . . . There was a time when the whole region behind Westminster Abbey was condemned by the County Council, and the lodging-house keepers and the poor and the semi-artistic people who lived there were given notice to quit. The County Council changed its mind. It was discovered that the houses were notable specimens of Queen Anne domestic architecture, and they were snapped up by eminently desirable tenants, who have furnished them with all the modern ardour for pretty and graceful things. Members of Parliament live in them, and novelists and artists, people in general who

Dempsey

carry an atmosphere with them. If Miss Ellen Terry did not live in her own little old Queen Anne house in Chelsea, this would be the most perfect region for her, the most perfect except Kensington. Proximity to the river is most fascinating, for its traffic provides an unfailing cure for boredom, and even the most desperate fit of gloom—outside the gloom of hunger—cannot withstand the red-dragon eyes of the tugs and floats going by in the night. Here also the Imperialist may gaze up at the Victoria Tower and Big Ben, and respond to the throb of the mighty intellects in the House grappling with problems of the State and the body politic, and feel the slow beat of the Empire's heart. . . . Here also he may see the boys of Westminster School and keep himself young with their youth, and, for more material purposes, the Army and Navy Stores are just round the corner in the long, trough-like wilderness of Victoria Street, the importance of which is powerless to penetrate the enchantment of Smith Square.

Dempsey has chosen the house in Cowley Street in which she proposes to live when she is married; that is, if she cannot have my house in Kensington.

We are agreed that no one but the very fine

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in spirit should be suffered to dwell in Queen Anne's Gate, and to have windows looking out on to St. James's Park, which we love even more than Kensington Gardens. . . . Dempsey, of course, wants to take the little house by the lake where the Master of the King's Fairies lives, and I shall recommend her for the post if it falls vacant before she is grown up. It has the best view in London of the pelican's rock, and even the Secretary of State for India has not a finer view of the lake. There is also the advantage that from the Master's house, which is next door to the nests of the ducks in the reeds, it is impossible to see the Victoria Memorial, and, if you cannot see the King setting out from Buckingham Palace, you can often see a pelican take the water from the rock. . . . This cannot be seen from the houses in Queen Anne's Gate, for the trees in the gardens in Birdcage Walk hide it all. Many wonders are unfolded before the windows of those houses, and in many of them are only the clerks of the Law and Commerce, who never look out, and have no eyes to see if they did. The thought of the waste of those houses makes me feel violently revolutionary, and we pass on, grappling with our feelings, which are so violent and so insurrectionary that we almost feel that we must

Dempsey

run across to Scotland Yard for safety. . . . Contrariwise, we run in the opposite direction and come to Buckingham Gate, where we find *the very house*. It looks out over the parade ground of the barracks to our beloved Park; but, alas! it belongs to a Royal foreign personage and is tied up for ever and ever. . . . This house is one of the few upon which the Master of the King's Fairies will condescend to call, and upon first and third Fridays he can be seen rowing slowly under the bridge—that is, if you have eyes like Dempsey's.

We found a tiny square by Victoria Station and wrote "Possible" on the wall. We turned up our noses at Carlton House Terrace and Eaton Square, explored the by-ways, and here and there approved, and so we wandered until we came to South Kensington. Here there is too much stucco, too much boredom, too much money. The end of the Cromwell Road has never been discovered, and several grown men have been lost, like Livingstone in Africa, in the desert of Queen's Gate. Yet happiness is such an obstinate growth that here and there are pretty little studios and crescents and odd streets tucked away, all simply defying the wealth and success of the rich houses with their fat pillars, and their

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fat butlers yawning out of the windows, all proclaiming as clearly as an A B C time-table, "There's no fun in being rich," and Dempsey heartily agrees. . . . There are many, many empty houses in South Kensington, all large, important, mutually flattering. Clearly then, either people are not so rich as they were, or they want to get more fun for their money than is to be had out of a house which needs an army of servants if it is to be lived up to at all. A house is quite large enough if every person in it has a room in which to be private for a certain portion of the day. In the slums no one has any privacy, and that is why the people are brutalised. In very large houses, inhabited by very few people, the probability is that they will have too much, and therefore live under one roof strangers to one another.

South Kensington, more than any other region, except perhaps Portland Place and Regent's Park, dashes our hopes. We feel that we are not big enough to cope with it.

From South Kensington,
From Paddington,
From Maida Vale,
From Bloomsbury,

Libera nos Domine!

Dempsey

That Litany seems to leave us very little to explore. The north side of the Park is said to be healthier than the south ; but, except for the fringe on the Bayswater Road there are so few streets and squares on which could be written "Possible" (for our purposes, *bien entendu*). . . . People carry their happiness with them, but there are certain streets into which they carry it at their peril, and of such are those gloomy thoroughfares which all seem to lead to the menacing ugliness of Paddington Station. . . . Farther East are less forbidding localities, and you may find squares which are veritable oases.

The nicest house in Portman Square is outside it. It is a stable converted to the uses of the nobler animal, and is certainly among those which we should transplant if we could have our own way and build a walled city of the nicest houses in London. *À propos*, there is a poor, lost, isolated house in Clapham, built by Christopher Wren, and absolutely clamouring for release from the dirty streets which have sprung up all around it. There are many such houses in and about London, putting Victorianism to the blush, and it is to be hoped that the jerry builder and the stucco architect are in the next world handed over to Wren and his great successors, who will know

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how to make the punishment fit the crime. Surely these, of all men, must find that

"Hell is a city much like London,"

and the designers of Westbourne Terrace must be set to build stucco houses on either side of a road which demands new rows as each is finished, and stretches on to infinity, even as it seems to do to the unhappy Londoner who walks that way.

What is the matter with Regent's Park ? . . . I don't know. It has a lake with islands, but it has not the naked charm of the Round Pond. It has green slopes, but it nowhere takes on the fascination of the avenues in Kensington Gardens. It has babies, but they have not the adorable infancy of our children. It has the Zoo, but that is a place of tragedy. It has the Botanical Gardens, and they are quite beautiful, but still, they are gardeners' gardens. It has, like the Underground, an Inner Circle and an Outer Circle; private roads, but they are too private. It has squirrels, but their tails are apt to grow lean and shabby. It lacks character. . . . When Dempsey and I walked through it, she said she felt the shadow of a gigantic nurse presiding over it and saying in an awful voice :

"You mustn't!"

Dempsey

We were so depressed by it that we left St. John's Wood to be taken on hearsay, and hurried back to our own beloved, cheerful Kensington, by which we mean that small corner of London tucked away on the north side of the High Street, which includes Edwardes Square, which was broken off in transit and dropped when first this abiding place of happiness was set in its present position. The east wind blows the charm of the Kensington Gardens about it, and the west wind is forbidden to carry it back again, so that the charm has accumulated through the generations and nothing can remove it, not even the occasional encroachment of tragedy and wickedness. We set out from it, perhaps with a little prejudice; we came back to it with prejudice strengthened and even fortified. We chuckled as we passed up Campden Hill Road past the German *Schloss*, and came presently to the Gardens which lie between Holland House and the place where the artists live. We refused to countenance the terrific blocks of flats which top the hill, or the yellow chimney of the waterworks. We wound in and out and round about, patting our favourite houses, called in at my own to see that the cat was well, and came to the Robins to report our doings and impressions.

V

The Nursery

“It is proper that while they are children they get wings.”

PLATO.

V

The Nursery

DEMPSEY and I must have taken two or three years over our pilgrimage through London, for we found the Robins still obstinately young, but without the first bloom and without the golden haze steeping all their thoughts. Their house was just a little shabby, just a little neglected, and Mrs. Robin was interviewing a woman with soft eyes who had never been there before. We women know a good nurse when we see one, and my heart leaped with joy for Lucy.

Miss Doy was going to be married, before they moved, to a clerk in the railway office at Paddington. She had grown very pretty, and I had marked the change in her from the moment when Lucy made her a little cap of black ribbon, which reached right round her head and had a white frill inside it. She was proud to wear it. It made her feel that she was a little different from

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other maids, and she did her best to live up to it. She had always rather fumbled with her affairs of the heart; but, under her new self-discipline, she very quickly discovered her own mind and agreed with the worthy clerk to shed her monosyllabic name. She was all smiles and healthy sentiment when I wished her well and every happiness.

Robin had been promoted to a weekly review, in which he had a whole page to air his opinions on things in general and any play he chose to visit in particular. He had a book out and several commissions, and could count on being invited out to dine with this or that celebrity or wealthy personage at least once a week—not at all a negligible source of economy. If not exactly prosperous, he was in a fair way to be so, and he subscribed to a press-cutting agency.

All that counted for nothing beside the immense thing that was to happen to them. It gave them a joy so wonderful that they were eager to share it with all the world, and, by way of letting me into it, they said that I was to help Lucy with the nursery in the new house. . . . This was my darling ambition, and for years I had spent much of my spare time, all my meditative leisure, in designing imaginary houses for babies.

The Nursery

The art of making a nursery is the art of leaving out. The new-comer will in course of time create his or her own conditions, and the arrangements of the room will have to be adjusted to meet the increase in the population.

When we set about looking for a new house our determination was to sacrifice all other requirements to finding a large nursery, facing south, with another smaller room next door to it—if possible, leading out of it—and sufficiently remote from the rest of the house not to have baby-worship thrust at all who came to it. . . . Dempsey produced the very thing, a house higher up the hill, much larger, more expensive, and with a kitchen and scullery built out at the back and two rooms over them, facing south, and cut off from the rest by a swing door on a landing half way up the first flight of stairs. We locked Robin up in his study and set him to make money, so that we might have the pleasure of spending it in the old and new furniture shops and the houses which sell brocades and stuffs. For themselves, there was only one more room to furnish, and the two attics for the servants. There was no basement.

There was a little garden back and front, and before anything else I took down my seedsmen's

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catalogues and planned out their equipment. The front garden was paved, except for a few inches by the outer railings, in which I decided to plant euonymus, to be grown into a clipped hedge. On the pavement I would have two standard red may-trees in tubs made of beer barrels, sawn in half and painted green, with black iron hoops. . . . I have a friend who keeps a public-house round the corner, and from him I supply my friends with tubs for their London gardens. The shops charge fabulous sums for their tubs. Beer-barrels are made of oak, last for ever, and three of them, planted and prepared, never cost more than six or seven shillings.

The back garden was more elaborate, and its description shall be held over for the general disquisition on London gardens which is to form a separate chapter.

As Lucy said, to have the front garden prepared and adorned with its little tubs made the house theirs at once, and gave them pride of possession before ever they opened the door.

The house was in a dilapidated condition, which was fortunate, for the landlord undertook the greater part of the cost of repairs and decoration. We wanted the outside walls white distempered, but the builder demurred to that,

The Nursery

saying that houses were always painted. Then we asked for white paint. He said he could not give us more than a pale cream. I am still at a loss to know why. Paint in London very soon goes a yellowy-brown or a dirty grey. White-wash retains its purity much longer, and when it becomes too dirty it costs very little to have it done again. I know of two or three London houses which have been treated in this way, and the result is infinitely more satisfying than paint. Another objection of the builder is that you cannot distemper over paint. That, however, as I have proved on more than one occasion, is not the case. Wherever one turns in practical everyday life one finds professional superstitions and shibboleths. Things that have been so must be so, and very often the men who subscribe to them are, privately, intelligent and humorous and imaginative. I never met a human being who was absolutely unimaginative; but, collectively, we work on unimaginative lines—entirely, I believe, because we are taught from our cradles up to indulge our fears—fears of the night, fears of being hurt, fear of the opinions of others, fear of being thought silly, fear of being a nuisance to other people. We grow up therefore perpetually subscribing to other people's opinions—they doing

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exactly the same sort of thing—and the result is the dull, dead compromise of thought and feeling against which everybody, being imaginative, revolts unsuccessfully. Every individual wishes to have his or her life living and splendid; collectively, our timidity forbids the fulfilment of that desire, except to the very few who defy the collective compromise and fight their way through the various tortures of neglect, insult, silence, which the rest of us mete out to them. “Nature,” it has been observed, “says to every one of us, Will you have your life living or dead?” Collective opinion answers that question in one way: individual desire answers it in another.

Therefore, when we come to a new life for which we have a certain responsibility, it behoves us to see to it that the little creature is not too early stifled and poisoned with the virus of collective timidity. The child has inevitably to come to the conflict, and it is better that it should issue from it on the side of the living than on the side of the dead. It should not be weakened or maimed, and I would write on the walls of every nursery these words:

*“The angel who presided o’er my birth
Said, ‘Little creature, form’d of joy and mirth,
Go, love without the help of anything on earth.’”*

The Nursery

There you have words to kindle the child's imagination in a way that "Bye, Baby Bunting . . ." and "Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled pepper" will never do. Personally, I don't believe children hear anything but the word "pickled" in the last nursery rhyme. The sound of it stirs laughter, and they like it, but it does not spur on their growth. It does not strengthen their wings, and that is what I am so intent on doing. If I had children of my own I should try to bring them up to seek for reasons for doing things, instead of reasons for not doing them. Consequences half-imagined are terrible; consequences seen and faced matter very little more than any physical discomfort. . . . This is a very serious matter, and I intend to speak of it solemnly, for in these days we are no longer able sincerely to discard this human life in favour of a celestial life which we hope is to succeed it. We are pinned down to the fact that there is not one of our actions but in course of time brings its own punishment or its own reward, in the way of greater wretchedness and bondage, or greater freedom and capacity for happiness. To train a child for celestial life without giving it any inkling save dark and lurid hints as to what it may expect in this human life is to

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court disaster, and, from a selfish point of view, to estrange it from you directly it comes in contact with the world as it is, and discovers that you have lied, or jockeyed, or concealed the facts from it. That and nothing else is the cause of the trouble that arises between mothers and daughters and fathers and sons.

Lucy and I talked it over and agreed that it could not be quite so simple as all that in practice, but we felt quite sure that it was, at any rate, a sane line of action to adopt, a line which might lead us somewhere better than the usual morass of doubts and half-thoughts and timid surrender to what is known as second best. After all, the child would probably be a mother or a father in his or her turn, and we could not very well expect it to see to it that its children had better chances than itself had had unless we helped it to make a better thing of life than we had made of it. It is all very well to say that we must take and leave the world as we find it. The point is that we don't, and can't. William Morris realised this, and did his full share of work to ensure that the change should be for the better, and to procure that is the aim and end of all artistic endeavour. William Morris did not, so far as I know, design nurseries, though probably

The Nursery

he did. He certainly had a large share, unknown to myself, in driving my energy to self-expression in the handling of houses, and especially nurseries.

Let us pass through the swing doors into the rooms which are to be given up to the sweetness of new life. First of all, there is a little passage, with a cupboard recess, in which to have the lavatory basin and a gas stove. Here the walls shall be covered with Emdeca (Robin has made a surprising amount of money). All round the end of the passage shall run a wide shelf, L shaped, for pans and utensils, and underneath shall be a cupboard for the tins of food and powder and all the nursery paraphernalia in that kind. That leaves very little wall space in the passage, for there are two doors at right angles to each other ; but what there is shall be covered with coarse canvas and distempered. The doors, of course, are to be white, and so also are both rooms in their general scheme.

At first, perhaps, it would be better to have the large room for the night nursery, and to leave the other to be occupied when the time comes. . . . But no ; Lucy wants to have it all prepared, as though John or Jane (as the case might be) would step into the world perfectly equipped

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and prepared to take charge of his (or her) domain. It was settled that the smaller room should be John's or Jane's kingdom by night and the larger by day.

Sacrificing beauty to utility, we decided to have all the walls painted white, so that they could be washed and always kept immaculately clean. Upon them it would be possible to stencil or plaster and varnish, or hang, any picture, devices, verses, letters, mottoes, stories, that should be caught up into the swiftly passing days of the child. . . . One great idea I have: to turn a corner of the wall into a black-board—paint it black, a square yard or two yards in length, by as much as can be spared in breadth, so that, when the impulse to draw arrives, as it inevitably must, crayons could be procured and the child left to scribble with free play of arms and shoulders, and never be left cramped and huddled over a piece of paper. It is only an idea, and for the moment it seems to be looking rather far ahead for John or Jane. But there, no sooner does one hear of the coming of a baby than one begins to plan its whole life, and even to look out for a husband or wife for it!

We had great days buying a cradle and the nurse's little wooden bed (and sawing off the

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end of it), and an ottoman for John's or Jane's wardrobe, and also for a seat for grown-up visitors, and a long solid immovable table, and four white chairs and a baby's chair, and a wardrobe for nurse, and a cupboard big enough to hold the accumulation of toys through years and years; and a tall fender with a gleaming copper rim to it; and a medicine cupboard for the nurse's room. On the floor we had a deep rich blue cork carpet and two gay rugs, one by the fireplace, purple, with thick pile on which John or Jane might roll to his or her heart's content, and we bought it so large that it would be impossible for an infant to roll from one end of it to the other without exhaustion. Babies must be left free to kick, and nowhere can they kick so comfortably and securely as on the floor.

The curtains were of chintz, white ground, covered with masses of gorgeous coloured flowers, and the inner curtains were of blue tussore. That done, we set about decoration, and were hard put to it to keep each other from running riot. We tried more tricks and dodges than I dare to tell, but in the end were forced to confess ourselves beaten. We had to admit that the decoration of a nursery must be cumulative and, to a certain extent, haphazard. The point of a

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nursery, as I take it, is to keep a child from early contact with the topsy-turviness of grown-up things, and to prevent its little brain from being beset and battered with more impressions, good, bad, and indifferent, than it can possibly take in. Millions of children, of course, have neither nurse nor nursery, and only such attention as their mother can spare from her often excessive labours in the house, and there is this to be said for it, that it does early encourage them in habits of independence. On the other hand, the right use of a nursery leads to gentleness, which I hold to be more desirable than any other quality, since, to my mind, it embraces all the rest. . . . On the walls of the night nursery I did manage to gain Lucy's permission to place, high up in a corner, where the light was generally dim and mysterious, a picture of Christian in the "Pilgrim's Progress" setting out on his journey. It was only inadvertently that I dropped into the symbolical, but all the great stories and all the great characters are symbols, by the truth that is in them. We furnished that room very simply and only with such furniture as was absolutely necessary, and left it, with Christian high up in the dim, mysterious light, waiting to take the other little pilgrim by the hand. I think the "Pilgrim's

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Progress" shall be the first book to find a home on the shelves of the nursery :

*"Oh, then, come hither
And lay my book, thy head and heart together."*

Here it is proper to say that the rest of the house became admirably Robinish, and was passed by Dempsey grudgingly as almost as good as my own.

All the rooms in the new house were much larger, and consequently much more comfortable. There was plenty of space for their old furniture, and to this they added another sofa and some cosy chairs. The drawing-room was a particularly jolly room, with only one drawback, and that Lucy quickly removed. Running across the whole of the back of the room was a conservatory, and two glass doors led into it. It was extremely ugly and of no possible use. Lucy's quick and discerning eye very soon saw, however, that here lay huge possibilities, and in a twinkling that conservatory was no more, or rather it was incorporated in the drawing-room. A long, low window was built, with leaded panes and a wide window-sill, and under this were bookshelves. The two glass doors were removed, as also was the wall between them. In the middle of the window

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a door led down a flight of steps into the garden. The outside of the wall was tiled, and the roof was flat, with an iron railing around it, and the window of the bedroom above gave on to it.

This was Lucy's bedroom, and as it was presently to occupy such an important place in Lucy's immediate future, very especial attention had been given to it. She had always had a great wish for two little four-poster beds, instead of the plain wooden ones of their impecunious days, and at various times we had found and purchased the necessary number of old carved posts, and stored them against the coming of a larger house and the correspondingly larger income. Then Mr. Doy was called in, and in a very short time the two little wooden beds were converted into two little four-posters, with deep mauve silk curtains and frills, edged with a narrow gold fringe. The bedspreads were two old Italian altar-cloths—my gift—and most appropriate, for, as a charming Frenchman has pointed out, a bed is an altar—the altar of birth and death.

So much money had been spent on the alteration of the drawing-room that there was little left for the dining-room and study. In the former, Lucy had revolted against white, and above a white panelled dado had stretched a dark blue

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coarse canvas. The carpet had originally been a light-coloured Oriental rug, of large size, and this had been dyed a purple, so dark that it was almost black. Both for this and the drawing-room Lucy had in her mind's eye big schemes for the future. A most attractive window for the dining-room, giving a wide window shelf; panelling for the drawing-room, painted white; and in a little recess, that seemed left especially for the purpose, a cupboard for books was to be built in the panelling, with a Gothic door, which had, instead of panels of wood, brass lattice.

This was for the future. We had very little time. Indeed, not one of us was capable of concentration on anything so trivial as decoration. We were all absorbed in the eternal problem: Would it be John or Jane? . . . Lucy pretended that she didn't care, but in her heart of hearts she wanted Jane. Robin pretended that he didn't care, but in his heart of hearts he was praying that it might be John. I wanted both, and I had my desire.

John was an hour older than Jane.

VI

The Two Bachelors

“La’, brother ! how book-learned you be.”

THE ROMANY RYE.

VI

The Two Bachelors

AT either end of the street in which I live is a retired bank-manager. They are both unmarried, and one occupies himself with reading all day long—six newspapers in the morning, two foolish novels in the afternoon, and *belles-lettres* or biography in the evening. The life of the other is centred in two dogs—one an Aberdeen, the other a pale grey, bob-tailed sheepdog. One man has lived in the same room for ten years, the other for seven. They meet perhaps twice a week, nod, but never speak. The dog-devotee takes his friends to the Serpentine every day, and every day at four o'clock the book-lover goes round to Mudie's and the Free Library. Very, very rarely do they venture farther afield, and they always look unhappy when their daily habits are broken. . . . Sometimes I see them looking wistfully at the children playing and the pretty girls and women going by.

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I became interested in them when John and Jane brought new light and joy into my life. It seemed so foolish to me that these two men should be living utterly, so timidly, so regretfully alone, and I was perfectly sure that their lodgings were hideous and that they were victimised by their respective landladies.

Dempsey knew all about them, for there is very little that escapes her eyes and ears, and she was keen and eager when I told her that she must scrape up acquaintance with the dog-devotee. It was fairly simple, for she was on excellent terms with both his dogs. The sheepdog had been allowed to get into a matted condition, and one day Dempsey marched up to him and said :

“Your dog is so unhappy with his coat like that. Will you let me comb him for you ?”

“It is my landlady’s dog,” said the devotee.

“But perhaps she wouldn’t mind,” replied Dempsey, and she marched off to see the good creature, who was too busy cooking from morning to night to notice whether the dog was properly kept. She left it to the bachelor, and, with a bachelor’s foolishness, he was too much afraid of her to touch the dog without her leave. He was also too bashful to discuss the matter with her. . . . He hardly ever spoke, and conveyed

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his few wishes by the expression he could put into ringing the bell.

Dempsey had it out with the landlady, and it was arranged that she should go every morning and comb the dog.

One day, as she was leaving the house, she found the bachelor hovering about the front gate, He approached her, stammering :

“I—I was wondering if your mother would bring you to tea one day.”

Dempsey saw at once that he took me for her mother, and she accepted the invitation without undeceiving him. She fixed an afternoon three days ahead, and the dog-devotee walked about in the interval as though the heaviest of clouds were hanging over him. . . .

I have never seen the inside of a police cell, but it can hardly be more depressing and gloomy than the room in which the unfortunate man spent his days. He had a dark green paper, which had never been altered since his arrival. The woodwork in the room was a dirty brown, and his window was half obscured by dusty-red serge curtains. He had a shabby red carpet on the floor. His sofa was mid-Victorian in shape and upholstery, and the springs of it were broken, as were the springs of his only easy chair. At least

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a quarter of the room was taken up by a huge mahogany sideboard with a mirror let into the back. His table was large enough for a family of eight, and, as if that were not bad enough, he had a great office writing-table against the only wall left. His mantelpiece was painted in imitation of green marble, and on the walls were hung wedding groups, a portrait of a celebrated swimmer, with all his cups and medals, a print of Frith's "Railway Station," and two plaques, painted with moss-roses on an apple-green background. Most odd of all was a huge drain-pipe painted with sunflowers, at which I glared so long that he explained that it was an umbrella-stand and was too large to stand in the hall. I inquired further, and discovered that when the other lodgers objected to any of the furniture, it was invariably dumped in his rooms, and his bedroom was like a second-hand furniture shop.

No wonder the man was ashamed to look the world in the face!

It seemed entirely characteristic that he should have procured a cake that not even the dog could eat, and that the spout of his teapot should be broken, and that he had only the coarsest of china and no two cups matching each other or their respective saucers.

The Two Bachelors

We talked about dogs, and he said he had always looked forward to the moment when he could retire and keep dogs. They were such company.

“Company?” said I. “London is full of company.”

He shook his head.

“There are too many people in London. You can’t get to know any of them.”

“You know us.”

“He wouldn’t have done if I hadn’t scolded him,” said Dempsey.

The bachelor looked very much ashamed, and on that I plunged into an enthusiastic description of the Robins, their house, their babies.

He looked very wistful.

“But first of all,” I said, “we want to make a change here. You can’t go on living like this.”

“Why not?”

“You can’t. It is suffocation, asphyxiation. It is so bad for you and worse for your dog.”

The thought of change seemed to terrify him.

“Get rid of the furniture,” I said.

“I can’t. It is my landlady’s.”

“She doesn’t want it. It’s ridiculous in a room this size. Sell it and buy more.”

“I can’t talk to her about that.”

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“ Will you let me paint the mantelpiece white ?
And then we'll see.”

He demurred, but finally agreed, and next day Dempsey and I arrived with a 7-lb. tin of paint and an armful of newspapers, and set to work.

We produced the anticipated result. The clean white paint showed up the dinginess of the rest, and the bachelor, sitting on the table while we worked, said :

“ You know, about every three weeks I feel that I can't stand it any more. Then I go for a long ride on a 'bus and I come back, and it all goes on just the same.”

“ It won't go on any more,” I said.

“ No.”

He was very firm.

We had it out with his landlady, a good bustling creature, who had been led to impose on him because he never seemed to mind. She agreed to part with the cumbrous furniture, most of which had come to her by way of legacies, and we bought him a little gate-legged table, some old Chippendale chairs, a comfortable Chesterfield, and a mahogany bureau which had a cupboard above for his books and plenty of room below for papers and letters and accumulative matter. We papered

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his walls with a brown-buff paper and gave him bright, amusing pictures, most of which we tore out of colour books. . . . All the woodwork was painted white, and I don't think that over the whole transaction we spent more than £30. The curtains, of course, had to be renewed, and the carpet too. The floor had already been stained for about 2 feet all round from the walls, so a square was bought of a jolly blue. The curtains were also blue, of a rather dark shade.

He was a new man. He bought a new overcoat and a new collar for the dog. He called on me, and I took him to see the Robins. We watched him, and one day we saw him accost the book-lover and take him up to see his rooms.

The book-lover's house had the ugliest door in the street, and one day we were surprised to see him out in the morning. He returned presently with a painter, showed him the stained and grained monstrosity, with its panels of red and yellow glass, and brought him up to see my door, which is enamelled black.

In a few days the book-lover's door was also black, and the red and yellow glass replaced with leaded panes. . . . A week later, and a cart-load of bamboo and wicker tables and chairs was taken out of the house, and the book-lover drove

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away in a cab, and the painters and decorators took possession.

The dog-devotee came to me chuckling, and said his friend at the other end of the street had taken him into his rooms and had declaimed in a loud voice :

“There is not a room in any man’s house but is pestered and close packed with a camp royal of devils.”

With that he seized a picture of a smiling chocolate-box beauty from the wall and ground his heel through it. He tore down a festoon of Japanese fans from above the mantelpiece and burned them. On the mantelpiece he had a collection of Goss china painted with the arms of various cities, and these he tipped into the coal-scuttle.

“Tell the woman,” he said angrily—“tell the woman to come and do for me what she has done for you.”

It was a long time before I made his acquaintance. He was angry with me for having disturbed his even existence ; but he too became a new man, and instead of sitting brooding and browsing in his room, he took to joining the dog-devotee in his daily excursions to the Serpentine. He lent books to the lonely man at the other end of

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the street, and they took it in turns, week by week, to comb and brush the sheepdog. They both sought Dempsey's company, but were so jealous that they would never go out with her together.

At last the book-lover called on me. He was very pompous and stiff at first, and talked of nothing but the weather and the prospect of war with Germany. He descended from that to books, and was surprised and delighted to find that I had read Jane Austen, whom he considered second only to Shakespeare in assured mastery of her art. . . . From that, after a little nervous fidgeting, he asked me if he might make the acquaintance of the Robins. He declared his opinion that Lucy was the prettiest little woman in London.

Lucy invited him to tea, and we showed him our nursery, which was now adorned with all the pictures that most appealed to John and Jane. He was curiously silent, and very much afraid of the children. He lifted them up very gingerly, and held them up close to his ear, as though he were listening to some strange noise inside them which should explain their mechanism.

He stood in the study and gazed reverently at the desk at which Robin wrote his books, and

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we had some difficulty in tearing him away from the shelves. He took down "Romany Rye," and stood still, saying to himself :

"There's a man ! There's a man ! Had the courage to say Scott was a fool, and so he was, but a genius, a very great genius . . . never corrected his own proofs."

Lucy smiled, and he apologised and said he supposed he was ridiculous, and became so confused that he dropped the detachable cuffs which he had donned for the occasion.

For three weeks after that no one saw anything of him until one day, when he came to see me. He stood by the door, shifting from one leg to another, and said :

"Do you think, ma'am, I am too old to be married ?"

I said that, as far as my experience went, no one was too old for it.

"I have been thinking of it, ma'am. I have been thinking of it for twelve years. . . ."

"Good gracious !" I said. "You have been keeping her waiting all that time ?"

He looked abashed.

"She—she has never been able to understand or sympathise with my enthusiasm for George Borrow."

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"I never knew a book," said I, "that was good enough to steal twelve years of a woman's life."

"I quite agree. . . . I'm going to be married, and my—my future wife would like to consult you about her house."

I declared that I should be charmed, and with that he went away.

In the sequel it appeared that he could not bring himself to move, and that he was, in fact, the tenant of the house in which he lodged. . . . Many years before his landlady had got into difficulties, and the bailiffs had been in the house, and he had paid her debts and taken over the responsibility of the rent. He allowed her to let the upper floors, so that now it was merely a matter of turning out the other lodgers.

His chief reason for not moving away was that he did not wish to lose his daily walk with the other bachelor and his dogs.

VII

London Gardens

*“Grant, O Garden-god, that I,
Now that none profane is nigh,
Now that mood and moment please,
Find the fair Pierides!”*

AUSTIN DOBSON.

VII

London Gardens

WISDOM cannot be put in a silver rod, nor love in a golden bowl, but it is possible to make a garden in London : not a garden that would pass muster before clear country eyes, yet one that shall please and serve its purpose for eyes dimmed to London uses and a brain dulled by London ways. . . . Enthusiastic clerks live from Saturday to Saturday solely for the hours they can spend dabbling with the earth, and bedding out and seeding and persuading trees to grow to shut out the noisy world. There is a shop in the city which does a vast trade solely in supplying seeds and bulbs and plants for suburban strips. There are several gardening periodicals which have no other clientele than these same London clerks, and the growth of the pastime and the enthusiasm is one of the most hopeful signs of the times.

At the other end of the scale are the dukes and

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millionaires, who are only gardeners by proxy, and can afford, if need be, to transport whole wagon-loads of rich soil from the farthest countries in England, or to send a messenger to the Himalayas or the Andes to fetch a particular plant known to be growing in a particular spot.

The sort of garden I have in mind lies between these two extremes. . . . Nobody writes books for millionaires. There are so few of them, and they must be so busy dodging their money and its frightful responsibilities, that it is doubtful if they read; and the suburban gardener is so thoroughly steeped in catalogues, and the tips and hints of his journals, that he could probably give me more new information than I could give him.

The problem here is what to do with the average piece of ground walled in behind the average house in central London, and, roughly, the owners of them fall into classes—those who have time to look after flower-beds and those who must have their plot so arranged that it calls for the minimum of attention.

To begin with the first class, large numbers of flowers are ruled out because it is impossible for them to live in London. On the other hand, there are flowers, such as hollyhocks, which thrive

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even better in the smoky air than they will in many parts of the country. The Japanese rugosa rose will respond bravely to the call upon its flowering energy, and nothing will stop irises growing, while certain lilies put forth with an almost swaggering defiance of conditions. Pink geranium Endressi will do anywhere, and you may have asters, and nasturtiums, and forget-me-not, and mignonette, and London Pride. . . . A walk through the parks in summer seems to give the lie to the statement that there is a single flower that will not grow in London; but then the parks are fed by the staff of magicians down at Kew, who have a special system of incantations by which they make plants grow, and accomplish all sorts of incredible feats of hybridisation. Unless these secret incantations can be acquired, no ordinary person can hope to emulate the feats accomplished in the Parks, and also there is this difference, that the average walled garden can obtain only a limited amount of sun and air, so that with plants the least bit delicate it is a waste of time trying to persuade them to settle down and make themselves at home.

However, without any vaulting ambition and with care, a good garden can be made with herbaceous borders and paved paths. For in-

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stance, I know a garden, in Kensington, just a strip at the back of an ordinary house, in an ordinary square, which is delightfully attractive, and during late spring and summer many meals are taken there. First of all, a little courtyard had been paved outside the back premises, and on this green tubs with bay trees were standing. This courtyard was then enclosed by two low walls, one on either side of a paved path which ran the length of the garden, and these walls were built up at the ends into four square columns, surmounted with stone balls. Between the columns were semicircular railings and a gate of wrought-iron of a simple design. At once the garden was cut off from the house and offices, and the proper note was struck. On either side of the paved path was a little grass plot, which met the herbaceous borders planted against the outside walls. Clematis, a grape vine, and some espalier fruit trees were growing against these walls, on the top of which was a low, square trellis, painted green. All the walls were distempered white, and made a good background for the creepers. A narrow bed ran down either side of the paved path, and these, according to the season, were filled with flowers. Snowdrops, crocuses—purple crocuses, for they

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say the birds do not care for that colour—daffodils, hyacinths, and tulips, following in quick succession, vied with one another in bringing the beauty of spring into grimy London. Later, a long line of Madonna lilies nod, and gossip, and whisper, and, under protest, do their best to be greater than Solomon in all his glory.

Another paved court at the end of the garden was the crown of the achievement, and it is here, when the weather is kind, that tea, and often dinner, are served. As a screen from the too curious eyes of the overlooking windows, a very ingenious and attractive shelter had been constructed. A number of standard laburnum trees—about eight, I think—were trained over a square trellis which extended the whole breadth of the garden. In the spring the beautiful yellow flowers hung down in profusion and exchanged greetings with a deep purple lilac bush that had cunningly been planted close by. On the white wall at the back were hung one or two Cantagalli della Robbias—those encircled with gorgeous swags of fruit—and in the middle, reflecting the whole length of the garden, was a small convex mirror in a black frame. This garden, even in winter, was a thing of beauty, and well repaid the trouble that had been expended on it.

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Another larger garden that I love is in Chelsea. It has wide herbaceous borders which often reduce me to a state of envy, so successfully do they challenge comparison with my garden in Surrey. The house it adorns is one of the loveliest in that land of beautiful dwelling-places. The back of it used to be—when the river was a means of locomotion—its principal entrance, and a broad flight of steps rises from a wide and spacious courtyard. A paved path runs nearly the whole length of the garden, and there are broad, grassy lawns on either side of it. About three-parts down the garden this path merges into a circular court, on which stands a fine old sun-dial, and round this court tall white lilies stand and shed their fragrance on those who pass by to the end of the garden, where a “sitting-out” place is arranged. This takes the form of a semicircular raised paved court, surrounded with flowering shrubs and low-growing plants which tumble about over the stones. There is in this garden a playground for the children and a squash racquet-court for the grown-ups. To divide the herbaceous borders from the more formal garden, a low wall extends for about 6 feet from the outer wall, on either side, of a demi-semicircular shape—that is, the end nearest the wall is consider-

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ably higher than that which meets the grass—and here also a stone ball finishes the column. Roses grow in this garden, and a magnolia tree, and jasmine and clematis; indeed, it is a garden of enchantment and fairies, and the little people who live under the plantain leaves, and the jolly red stalks of the megaseas are as much at home with their London playmates as they are with their country-bred cousins. The house is a fitting mate to the garden; every room is panelled and has the little powder closets belonging to the period. The courtyard in front of the house has old flowering trees growing through the stones. Altogether a home that may well bring peace and contentment into the hearts of its owners, and envy and all uncharitableness into those of their friends.

Except in the dingle in Hyde Park and a patch or two in St. James's Park, there seems to be no real lawn in London. From the embankment the Temple Gardens deceive the eye; but when you come to walk in them it becomes clear that it is only a brave endeavour. Would there were more endeavours in those gardens. . . . Far be it from me as a mere private individual to carp and cavil at so august an institution as an Inn of Court, but surely it were possible to

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do more than maintain the existing conventional beds with their geraniums and blue lobelias. Surely that were a wilderness that could be made to blossom like the rose; surely the benchers could join forces with the Kew magicians and learn a spell or two. The excuse may be that in vacation the children of the poor are allowed to romp and scramble in the gardens, and they would destroy the plants and flowers. They might; but there is always a janitor watching over them. They might; but, even if they did, it would be no great matter. The best of the garden would be over, and, as it is, April, May, June, and July are all wasted for the sake of August and September. However, as I say, that is the business of the aforesaid august corporation and is no affair of mine, except in so far as I have a right to express a conviction that wherever it is possible to plant a rich and beautiful garden in London, it should be done. . . . We are so dilatory. We look at the State and expect it to achieve our revolutions; those who are responsible for the State look at the individual and perceive that no advantage has been taken of new facilities afforded. Therefore it is our business—we who are intelligent enough to perceive the gulf between the aspiration and the

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achievement—at once to set to work to make such gardens as in time and money we can afford. . . . Most of us can afford very little: therefore we must evolve some plan more or less stereotyped, and have our little gardens paved with brick or stone or covered with burnt ballast.

Our walls we can distemper red, or white, or buff, according to individual taste, or leave the bricks untouched, if they permit of it, and thereon we can grow creepers, small ivy, ampelopsis Veitchii (the close-clinging Virginia creeper), and clematis and jasmine, and the grape vine and magnolia, and Forsythia and even wistaria. We can have neat little shrubs, and clipped box and privet, and bay-trees in tubs. May-trees will grow anywhere, and these, too, can be standards and kept clipped into round heads. . . . And then in such a garden it is possible to have one or more statuettes to suit its capacity, a bird bath, and drinking bowl for your dog—if you have a dog—and a stone seat, on which neither you nor anybody else will ever sit. London gardens are, for the most part, not meant to be lived in, and after the first charm of novelty is over it is doubtful if they will be looked at. Most probably the best view of them is to be had from the kitchen window. . . . Why then go to all this trouble?

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Because no inch of a house or its surroundings ought to be slovenly. If a cook has to do her work at a window which looks out on to a bedraggled, unkempt, untidy, sodden piece of blackened earth, she cannot help but grow slack and depressed, and disinterested and disordered. She will corrupt the housemaid, the housemaid will corrupt the nurse, and the sacred nursery will be defiled. That is the advantage of the paved, bricked, or ballasted garden. It does not easily get out of hand, and it can be cleaned with as little trouble as a drawing-room that is dusted and tidied day by day. . . . I was very firm with Lucy about it, and had in a man to do her garden, and when I had done that I tackled the book-lover's, and then, my ardour being unappeased, I went and sought out the newly-married Miss Doy in the purlieus of Paddington, and with a trowel planted her a grape-vine and an ampelopsis, and bought her six old paving-stones, which were quite enough for her little yard, that was no bigger than a pocket-handkerchief. . . . When I went over her house I was delighted to find that she had profited by her two years with Lucy, and had got her father to fit her with cupboards and shelves, which her husband had himself painted, and papered their

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tiny rooms in emulation. The result was a little uneven, but there were in it the signs of effort and the atmosphere was healthy.

Bless them both!

Can the uncreative be made creative by example? It would seem not, but I am very sure that health is infectious, and what I seem to be breaking down on all sides is nothing more than vanity. That and nothing else is the wall that lies between most men and women and their health, physical and moral. It was the foolishness of vanity in Miss Doy that made her fumble with her affairs of the heart; it was a more cruel and coarser vanity that kept the book-lover pondering whether he could or could not marry; it was, after all, nothing but an abominable vanity in the other bachelor that he could not see to the welfare of the sheepdog. . . . There is in every human mind a sort of almost automatically lying cell which flatters, flatters, flatters, and is perpetually whispering to the greedy ear of vanity "facts contrary to the honour of God, to the visible order of creation, to the known laws of Nature, to the histories of former ages, and to the experience of our own, and which no man can at once understand and believe." There, I think, is touched the heart of the most of human misery.

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Against this lying voice words are powerless. Nothing can break down the sort of moral hypocrisy from which we suffer save activity, healthy activity. There is a verse which expresses exactly what I mean :

*“Once in a saintly passion
I cried with desperate grief:
O Lord, my heart is black with guile,
Of sinners I am chief.
Then stooped my guardian angel
And whispered from behind—
'Vanity, my little man;
You're nothing of the kind.'”*

Nothing so reproaches that sort of thing as a garden. Even such a London garden as I have described cries out upon it. In the garden dwells the guardian angel of each household, and you must look to it that it is kept fit and neat, else the guardian angel will fly away and no voice will be heard save that of the inward flatterer. . . . I have known more than one fair and promising household in London come to wreck and split upon neglect of the garden.

VIII

A Wedding

“He felt a reformed man, delivered from temptation ; and the vision of his future life seemed to him as a promised land for which he had no cause to fight.”

SILAS MARNER.

VIII

A Wedding

It seems reckless not to keep the wedding to the end of the book, but I am of a rather impatient temper, a little old for young emotions, and my interest in life, as in books, begins after marriage. Those houses only are complete that are made and used, like nests, for nursery purposes, otherwise they seem to me half-empty, unwarmed, and undeveloped, like people who have never been in love—if there be any such. So then, when there is a wedding toward I do all in my power to hurry it on, and urge the folly of being engaged for more than a day.

My friend the book-lover thought over his conversation with me for a week, avoided me and Dempsey, and spent many hours looking at the solitary heron that lives under the willow by the Long Water. That bird has never known a nest since he made his flight from that in which he was born. He has a melancholy eye, and so had

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the book-lover. I have pilfered the book-lover's thoughts, and here set them forth :

- (1) A bachelor is but half a man.
- (2) Lodgings are a very dear and just trial of youth. For the mature they are a prison without moral significance.
- (3) No man can live in books, because the laws of life are greater than the laws of literature.
- (4) What is love ?
- (5) I don't know, but I want it.

With that he took off his hat to the heron and hurried to the railway shop and bought a ticket which displayed his right to travel to a certain village in Sussex on Friday and to return not later than Tuesday. This ticket was pink with two green stripes. He bought it on Wednesday. On Thursday he told me he had bought it. On Friday morning he came and suggested that I should use it. On that I scolded him severely, looked up the train, made him write it down on the back of an envelope, and exacted a promise that he would not mention George Borrow during his stay, nor take with him a copy of any of his works. I lent him my copy of "Sandra Belloni," as he had not a pocket edition.

On Tuesday night I received a telegram,

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handed in at the post-office round the corner.
It was very laconic :

“ Done it.—B. T.”

I never had a coherent account of his adventure from him, but he insisted on the beauty of the daffodils and of the larks soaring from a gorse bush in bloom, and he told me that he thought it a duty for every man and woman in London to go down into the country in spring.

“ August,” he said, “ is much too late.”

“ Too late for what ? ”

“ To learn,” was his reply; and though he was bald and grey, though his face was gaining the shapelessness of middle age, yet, peeping out of his eyes I could see the heart of one who had heard the song of the world and had found his voice to join in it.

Her name was Emily. She was presented to me when she came up to see the house in which she was to live. She was very little. She had large, soft eyes, and she had faded into a sort of charm, which gained from the bewilderment into which London threw her. I was asked to take her to the shops where the best things could be most cheaply bought. My first impulse was to reform her dress, her hair, her walk, and to rush

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her into greater self-confidence and "smartness"; but I had not been with her a couple of hours when I began to see her with the book-lover's eyes. I saw that she had been laid by in lavender, and in her twelve years of waiting had come by no bitterness, but rather greater sweetness and understanding. She had a quaint sense of humour and a naïve and wholly delightful lack of self-consciousness. It was an assumption with her that her book-lover was as wonderful to me as he was to herself, and she never seemed to dream but that the whole world was determined to marry him in this life or the next. She had waited so long that a little more or less made no matter, and she was really regretful that her happiness should take her away from her reverend father and her two unmarried sisters, and the little green garden under the church spire. She longed for them to be able to share the glory, the satisfied ambition of being Mrs. Book-lover, even as Napoleon could not hold himself in when it came to making kings and queens of his brothers and sisters. If ever a man was in for a thorough spoiling, it was the book-lover. He had behaved abominably, but that was nothing to her. Had he not the right, being himself, to behave abominably? He had kept her waiting for twelve good

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years. Time, so far as she was concerned, was in his ordering. And yet she was very clever. She had a supreme mastery of suggestion. When it came to furnishing she had everything that she wished, and yet it seemed that it was he who was dictating everything with much cudgelling of his mighty brain and much waving of his lordly hand. She used me brilliantly. She saw how in all matters of taste he clung to me, and when we were alone together she would bring her little schemes to me for my approval, and then when the three of us forgathered she would turn to me, as though she had thought of it for the first time :—

“ B—— thinks so-and-so would be right. I’m not sure. What do you think ? ”

And I would assure her that B—— was perfectly right. Then he would fall still further under her suggestion and say, with a chuckle :

“ I told you so.”

Too old to be married ? These two were infants in arms compared with the Robins. I doubt if either of them had been young before, and it was delightful to see how little by little they lost their timidity in the face of it and grew less shy of each other. They saw the sights of London and went to the theatre, and took long

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rides in 'buses, and Dempsey and I felt very old and very much out of it—almost reactionary. Roll all the Radicals and Socialists and Syndicalists into one, and you get a being not one-millionth part as revolutionary as love—even if it be love in the hearts of those who have looked the other way almost too long. . . . I am not sure but that I am with Anatole France in his declaration that if he were the Creator of All Things he would place human beings on the footing of certain insects and give them youth and love at the end of their lives. And yet I am sometimes so sure that, if they only would, human beings need not have love and youth only at the beginning or the end, but may have them through all their lives. Some men have done this, and a few women, and there is hardly one of whom it is possible to think that all hope is lost ; only, for most of us, much suffering is needed to bring us to our senses. What we do is what we believe, and if our belief is muddled so will our doings be. Therefore those who, like our book-lover and his Emily, without a cause, hold life at arm's length, can only have a little love, though, mercifully, they will never know how small it is.

My other bachelor was made violently unhappy by this intrusion of sentiment into his

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affairs. He had been rather proud of himself for the ease with which he had swallowed one revolution, but when that led to another without a decent interval the stiff-necked Conservative in him waxed strong, and he frowned upon our weakness. He avoided the book-lover's house while Emily was in town, and gave me the most ferocious glances when he met me in the street. As soon as Emily returned to the country for her final preparations he called on his friend in the morning as usual, with his dogs. He had admired the book-lover's capacity for silence ; but lo ! the flowers in the gardens filled him now with thoughts of the larks soaring from the gorse and the daffodils all a-blowing, and he let fly with praises of Woman and abuse of the barrenness of lodgings.

"Once," said the dog-lover, "I knew a man who was married three times, and when he found himself going to do it a fourth time——"

"What did he do ?" asked the book-lover.

"He wrote himself a letter from his third wife, saying she was in Australia. . . ."

Here the dog-lover's capacity for invention gave out, and he stopped and lit a pipe. Close by a very small baby was exercising its powerful lungs.

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“That,” said the dog-lover, “that is what he couldn’t stand.”

The book-lover pondered this while they walked round by the dingle where the rabbits live. There he uncorked himself and said :

“I am told that all healthy children do that.”

“Yes,” said the dog-lover ; “yes, they do. At night. . . . Give me a dog.”

The book-lover consoled himself by remarking that Emily had no objection to smoking in the drawing-room, and was anxious that he should lose neither his old habits nor his old friends.

“They always say that,” snapped the dog-lover. “But do they do it ? Oh ! dear no ! They pick a man’s bones clean—friends, habits, thoughts, are all gobbled up !”

This was too much for the book-lover. He struck the path with his walking-stick, so that the pebbles flew, and he cried :

“My good sir, what do you know about it ? Nothing, nothing at all. Read Meredith, sir—read Meredith !”

“Thanks,” retorted the dog-lover. “I prefer Nat Gould.”

This, you must know, was a quarrel. They

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parted then and there, and returned to the street by different ways. Each came and told me that he had been grossly mistaken in the other.

The dog-lover said that the book-lover was dense and had no sense of humour. The book-lover told me that the dog-lover was a dangerous and light-minded man with a soul that could rise no higher than the kennel.

“Why, madam, towards things that to you and me are sacred he has the attitude of mind of a—a—stud-book!”

I did my best to pacify both, and tried to make them see that it was useless to chafe against the change which had already set in, and I suggested as gently as possible that in chivalry they were bound to think first and last of the woman's—that is, Emily's—happiness.

They refused to make it up, and, as I was very busy in the house with curtains and wall-papers, and almost every day brought its new commission, I left them to brood over it to their mutual discomfort. The book-lover poured out his woes to Emily, and she wrote me voluminous letters, imploring me to repair the breach. To these I only replied by suggesting that she

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should send the dog-lover an invitation to the wedding.

He did not respond to the R.S.V.P., but he turned up all the same in a very old top-hat that must have seen twenty years' service at weddings and funerals, and a white waistcoat and tie and lavender gloves which split in the effort of getting into them. He sat at the end of the church and said "Amen" in a very loud voice whenever the opportunity was given him, and quite often when it was not.

I caught him as he was slinking out of the church and haled him to the rectory for the breakfast. There he was shy and very awkward at finding himself among so many women, but he saved the situation by slipping a Russian leather case on to the table where the other presents were set out. When it was opened it was found to contain an amethyst necklace. There was a great buzzing and twittering, and the book-lover shook him warmly by the hand and assured the company that there never was such a fellow. Emily said she was quite sure there never was, and the dog-lover went very red and moved from one foot to the other and said to the ear of Emily's youngest sister :

"Ah! but you should see my dog."

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"I should love to," said Emily's youngest sister.

It was a very jolly and a very pretty wedding: thoroughly English, thoroughly country, quite old-fashioned. Everybody became sentimental about it, and there was a great deal of kissing and some joking, and all the villagers had a great deal of beer to drink, and the choir and the bell-ringers had a terrific meal in the rectory kitchen. Miss Emily had become a London lady, and that was a tremendous adventure.

Shoes and rice were thrown after the bride and bridegroom, and the dog-lover and I travelled back to London together. He was very silent and very uncomfortable in his wedding clothes. As we were nearing Croydon, he said:

"A charming family."

"Very," I replied.

"What was the name of the youngest one?"

"Sophia."

As Dempsey says, there is nothing quite so catching as happiness. There came a day when the dog-lover heard of a dog-show in Sussex, and he, too, went to the railway shop and bought a pink ticket with green stripes, which declared his

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right to travel to a certain village on Friday and to return not later than Tuesday. And he, too, saw the daffodils and the wonder of the larks soaring from the gorse in bloom.

So did Sophia.

IX

Dempsey's Fairy

*“ When children are playing alone on the green,
In comes the playmate that never was seen.”*

R. L. S.

IX

Dempsey's Fairy

THIS is a very important chapter. Having married off everybody available, and having meddled with their houses—I had to find one large enough to accommodate Sophia and three dogs, and discovered the very thing up the hill overlooking the convent garden—I am bound to see to it that they are properly equipped, morally and spiritually. I should never smile again if it came to pass that either of my old bachelors were unhappy or that the Robins should be brought by my advice, given just a little recklessly, to poverty or the soul-destroying wear and tear of enforced and habitual niggardliness.

The poor are in better case than those brought up in comfort. They have nothing to unlearn, no energy running to waste in longing, no visions to disturb their ingenuity in putting off the wolf at the door with excuses and last week's crusts.

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They are so used to living at the foot of a volcano that they are indifferent to their peril. With gentle people, to whom four hundred a year—with all due respect to my Socialist friends—is very real and even devastating poverty, the knowledge of their peril, their dread of being submerged, hangs like a heavy cloud over them. Families increase and incomes don't, and there you have the puzzle, the solving of which absorbs much of the best thought of the country. Consider the books and the pictures and the music of which the world is robbed by the obsession of the puzzle in the minds of artists who have had the misfortune to be born in the middle classes. Do what you like, babies will be born just when you cannot quite afford them. Say what you like, but we cannot expect Nature to adjust herself to suit Society. We had much better adjust Society to suit Nature—a trifling task which everybody agrees to leave to posterity.

The abyss is quite a jolly place when you have fallen into it.

The mischief for people like the Robins is in the hanging on the brink, suspended with your very hungry family. It is all the worse when you feel quite sure that you are not really going to fall, but see how easily you might. The terror

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of this dream is that you see yourself falling like a stone down—down—down, and never realise that before very long you fall into another point of view and look up instead of down; you are thankful that you can see as much of the sky and sun and the moon and stars as you can.

The rich look down and the poor look up, and therefore they do not understand each other. Artists are people who look down and up at once, but the trouble is that no man is always an artist at will.

Young people, being clothed and fed at the expense of others, always look up, and the youth was not yet gone out of my Robin, though he was a householder and a father. The youth in him looked up and crowed, as is the way of youth: the householder in him looked down and shivered, as is the way of householders. Very, very occasionally the artist in him looked both up and down and felt brave. Being a young woman, Lucy had a way of looking straight forward and seeing everything in a practical light. She had her dreams, too, but never let them interfere with her business. Robin may have provided the bricks of their life, but she certainly supplied the cement, as is the way of women, and when the house is built they let the man have

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all the credit of it, for they know what human glory is worth—that is, nothing. Men are always talking and writing about woman's secret, though I am always puzzled to know to what they refer. Perhaps it is their contempt for human glory, which it seems impossible for men to understand. I have never been conscious of nursing any marvellous secret or of hugging to myself any sphinx-like mystery, though when I was very young I was more than once foolish enough to tickle a man's vanity by seeming to subscribe to his theories about my baffling, unsolvable self; and I have always been ashamed of it.

This book is not directly a personal confession, and I must come to the business in hand—the description of my discovery of the most essential piece of furniture for a happy house.

Dempsey found it on her walks in St. James's Park. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that she or it found Dempsey.

It was at the spring equinox, the period when we give children Easter eggs, unconscious, for the most part, that we are symbolising the eternal fecundity of the earth and all that therein has its being, including our puritanical, timid, foolish, obstinate, and absurdly vain selves; the period when, whether we like it or not, our frosty

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thoughts are thawed by the spring sunbeams, and we set about scouring our houses and our hearts to make them worthy of the new hopes that come to flower in us. Spring-cleaning has its poetry, though it were hard to bring it home to the housewives and housemaids, who look upon it only as a time of dust and loss of temper and aching limbs and broken china. Spring-cleaning is symbolised in the Easter egg just as much as the building of nests and ant-heaps and the leaping of the daphne into flower, and the processions of the crocuses and tulips. It is like all these pageants—an annual proclamation of the love of the world, though it be done never so sourly, and, by hired window-cleaners, charwomen, joiners, carpet-beaters, etc., never so sordidly. It is during spring-cleaning that the essential piece of furniture for the year's happiness must be found. I had always found mine unconsciously until this famous Easter when Dempsey brought it on her shoulder into our street.

Dempsey, you must remember, is an Irish child, and can see things which are hidden from the ordinary person, and, what is more, she can make others see them when they are, as she says, "loving enough."

We had a great Easter, for London was so

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beautiful that we all forgot how hard up we were, and Robin ceased to be haunted by his failures during the winter, and his pen had been found prising open the lid of the ink-stand in its eagerness to resume work. It had also made several blots on the blank paper by way of reminder that it did not intend to be left behind when all the rest of the world had turned to and was creating life, and ever more life.

We all gathered for late breakfast on Easter Sunday at the Robins', and every one of us, including the book-lover's baby, had an Easter egg under a bush. Sophia Dog-lover, who was only just married, could not find hers until the Dog-lover went on all fours and crawled under the laurel, beneath which everybody, including Sophia, knew that it was hidden. That done, we all passed into breakfast and ate our eggs—none of your new-fangled chocolate or sweetmeat or cardboard devices, but genuine new-laid eggs dyed a brilliant red with beetroot.

We were all so excited—childishly, if you must cavil, though none of us was so very old—that it was some time before we noticed Dempsey's empty chair, and remembered that we had left her egg under the berberis. We were to blame for our haste, but she was more to blame

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for her unpunctuality. She always displayed the most utter disregard of time.

Just as the last of our eggs was eaten, in she came, bubbling over with fun, carrying something in her hands. I asked her what it might be, and she answered :

“ A present for everyone.”

She refused to satisfy our curiosity until she had found her egg. Sophia was so anxious to know the secret that she blurted out the word “ berberis.” However, Dempsey pretended not to hear and looked under the rhododendron and the laurel and the euonymus until she found her egg. She brought it back held perilously between finger and thumb, while her two hands were still held over her prize.

We were all made to guess, and when we had given it up she opened her hand, and there, standing on her toes, was a fairy. She was lit up by a pale sunbeam that found its way at that moment through the window.

I cannot vouch for what the others saw, but I found myself gazing without any surprise upon a tiny creature no taller than a bobbin of cotton. She was perfectly formed, and had rose-pink legs, white shoes, a rainbow *tutu*, and a corsage of down. She bore a remarkable resemblance to

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Anna Pavlova, except that she had two wings like goldbeaters' skin.

I have never known such pleasure. I felt myself smiling from top to toe, and when I looked at the others I saw that they were all filled with a rare joy as though they were seeing the world and each other for the first time. . . . Upstairs the babies laughed and crowed, and the fairy, hearing them, flew out through the window up the sunbeam, and darted into another, down which she slid into the nursery.

The book-lover sighed and Sophia said :

“ Dear me ! ”

We looked at each other and agreed that there was nothing to be said. Words were too coarse, too much charged with misunderstanding to come anywhere near what we were all wanting to express. There was a long and painful silence, from the final pain of which Dempsey saved us by beginning to sing :

*“ Little London people,
Living all awry,
Come and join the Spring Time.
Ask not how or why.*

*Let your eyes see visions;
They are there to see.
Come—the heart's a-wonder—
Follow, follow me.”*

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And I believe we should have followed Dempsey even if she had led us a race over a rainbow or through the clouds.

I began to see a sceptical light in the book-lover's eyes, so I asked Dempsey how she had come by the fairy.

"I often catch them," she said.

"How?" asked the book-lover. "That's the point. How?"

"It's quite simple," replied Dempsey, as though it were the most ordinary thing in the world. "You just want one. It doesn't much matter what the weather's like, though April is the best month for them. So many of them go away disappointed very soon after Easter because there aren't enough people who want them."

"But how?" said the book-lover.

"You must feel as free as a cloud and as glad as a bird, and then you must say, 'I love everything and everybody,' and if it's true, if you're not just pretending, then one will come home with you, and then you're all right for a year."

"That reminds me," said the dog-lover, "of a story my father used to tell about a man——"

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On the mention of a story Dempsey forgot all about her fairy and settled herself to listen ; and the dog-lover, finding himself with an audience, adopted the curious singing voice of a story-teller in a bazaar and began.

X

How the Dog-lover was Born

“I tell them,” said de Bracy, “that I mean to purvey me a wife after the fashion of the tribe of Benjamin.”

IVANHOE.

X

How the Dog-lover was Born

“My father,” said the dog-lover, “was the saddest man I ever knew. He rose from humble surroundings, and reached about half the height of his ambition. He was a greengrocer’s son, and died a newspaper reporter. He always used to say that he longed for the day when he would be able to tell his own lies instead of writing down those of other people. He loved lying, and therefore I do not vouch for the truth of this story.

“My father’s brother was a policeman, a solid, respectable man who had so little imagination that he never had any difficulty in telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. He was always believed in court, so that he never had any occasion to doubt his own veracity. My father and he quarrelled because my father could not resist embellishing his reports, and, out of loyalty to the family, whenever he had one of

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my uncle's cases to report, he would pat him on the back and, if possible, make him out a hero. My father was the sort of man who cannot live without heroes and heroines and motherless children. It does not matter what it was all about, but in the end my father gave his brother a quarter of a column of such a flaming character that he received an invitation to tea next day. My father went expecting to receive thanks, perhaps to hear of his brother's promotion, and received such a leathering as he had not had since they were boys together.

"My relations, like most people's, are rather queer. In course of time my father rose above police-court work, and my uncle became a District Divisional Inspector. They did not speak to each other for years, and, strangely enough, neither married.

"One night, when my uncle was doing whatever a District Divisional Inspector does in the small hours of the morning—arresting dogs and all that—he came upon a man and a woman in one of the main thoroughfares of St. John's Wood. The woman was fainting, and the man was kneeling by her side. That man was my father.

"My uncle recognised him at once, and turned his back on him, and my father cried :

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“‘Shame on you, William! Is there no humanity beneath your three waistcoats and four vests? This woman is entirely unknown to me. I was walking home from my editor’s house when she asked me with much diffidence and a very proper shyness if I could tell her where she was. I told her, and she swooned.’”

“My uncle moved a step farther away.

“‘In God’s name,’ cried my father, who always had an itch for writing stories, and often talked like that—‘in God’s name, William, I charge you to listen to me. Have you no chivalry? One of us must fetch water.’”

“My uncle made no reply.

“‘And you a policeman,’ said my father, jeeringly, ‘and can’t tell a case when you see one!’”

“That touched my uncle on the raw, and he drew out a note-book and jotted down the time and the name of the street, asked my father’s name and address and the name and address of the woman. Just at this moment she awoke from her swoon, and, according to my father, she had the most beautiful eyes in the world.

“My uncle asked her her name, but she only shook her head. He asked her where she lived, but again she shook her head.

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“ ‘ A case of lost memory,’ said my uncle. ‘ She must come along o’ me.’

“ ‘ I will take her home and see that she is cared for,’ said my father.

“ ‘ She’s a case,’ muttered my uncle stolidly, and he took her professionally by the arm. My father laid his hand on my uncle’s arm, and my uncle blew a whistle and gave him in charge for molesting the police in pursuit of their duty.”

“ What an awful man,” said Sophia.

The dog-lover continued :

“ My father procured bail and, appearing before the magistrate next day, he was dismissed on evidence as to character, and had a very full report of the whole adventure in his paper.

“ The fair unknown, meanwhile, was taken to the infirmary, and her clothing was examined to see if there were any clues as to her identity. None was forthcoming, and she received innumerable offers of marriage, and countless parcels of old clothes were sent to her by charitable spinsters.

“ My father did not forget her, but when he made inquiries of my uncle he could gain no information as to her whereabouts, the fact being that my uncle had fallen in love with her, and had offered to procure a situation for her as wardress in a prison. This much my father

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gathered from other sources, that his brother's passion was unrequited, and that she shrank from him.

“Remembering the beauty of her eyes, seeing in her the heroine of heroines, my father was unremitting in his search. In vain. He traced her, always to find that she had flown, no man knew whither. The reports as to her health were invariably good, and it seemed that she had recovered her faculties and was perfectly normal, with the exception that her past life, previous to the moment when she had approached him in St. John's Wood, was a blank to her mind.

“For nine months my father searched. He referred the matter to Scotland Yard, and to his disgust found it placed in the hands of his brother, who had been promoted shortly after the affair. My uncle behaved most unscrupulously, and when, as an official, he had discovered the woman in attendance upon an old lady in Bournemouth, he used his knowledge for his own private purposes. He concealed the facts from my father, and every week-end stayed at a boarding house on the West Cliff. He pestered the unhappy creature—who, if she were beautiful before, was now dazzling—with his attentions, gave her presents, which she dropped over the pier into the sea, and at last

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almost drove her into a most ill-omened union with a job-master.

“Fortune smiled upon my father. One day it chanced that she gave great offence to her employer, an irascible tyrant who was insensible to her beauty and her virtue, and received instant notice to leave. She packed her box, informing neither my uncle nor the job-master of the turn in her affairs, and resolved to fly to Pernambuco. At the very bottom of her box she came upon a slip of paper cut from the *Daily* —, which had been sent to her by a newspaper cutting agency, with a printed form requesting them to send her all references to herself in the Press of the United Kingdom, British Colonies, and America. She read this piece of newspaper, which was none other than my father’s account of his adventure, and she recognised her detested pursuer, and her eyes filled with tears of gratitude at the discomfort suffered on her account by her would-be saviour.

“Then and there she wrote to my father at the newspaper office, and it reached him that very night, for he happened to be on late work.

“He caught an early train next day, and during the journey he read the letter—the first love-letter he had ever received—at least forty

How the Dog-lover was Born

times. At Bournemouth Station he was horrified to see his brother descend from the next carriage but one to his own. He avoided him by a ruse, but the truth flashed across his mind, and he resolved that at all costs he must be there first. He took a fly. My uncle, all unsuspecting, walked.

“My father descended from the fly almost feverish from excitement. A cab was waiting at the door. It contained luggage. The label bore the name ‘Maria Blake,’ the name under which she had written to him. Round the corner of the road, only two hundred yards away, rolled my uncle. Across the way loitered the job-master.

“The door opened. More beautiful than ever she had been, pale—I can’t remember all my father’s description—she came down the steps and placed her white hand in my father’s.

“‘I knew you at once,’ she said.

“Then she looked beyond my father, and an expression of horror and alarm came into her eyes.

“‘Save me!’ she cried.

“My father turned and felled my uncle with a blow, hurled his affianced bride into the cab, and they drove away. At the corner my father

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turned and saw the job-master dusting the seat of my uncle's trousers."

The dog-lover ceased and drew a long breath. No one seemed to realise that that was the end of the story, and he went on :

"My father was never tired of telling that story. It used to vary considerably."

"Was her name really Maria Blake ?" asked Dempsey.

"Many years afterwards," said the dog-lover, "my mother confessed to me that she had never really lost her memory, but, being reduced by illness to utter poverty, she had devised that method of finding her way to the heart of a seemingly heartless world. She never told my father."

"But," said I, "how could Dempsey's fairy make you think of your father's story ?"

"It explains how I was born, and just then seemed to me to be both romantic and interesting."

"I think it is beautiful," said Sophia.

XI

Robin's Uncle

*“Even with the very comment of my soul
Observe my uncle. . . .”*

HAMLET.

XI

Robin's Uncle

I HAVE never had very much money, and had never much felt the want of it until I met the Robins and fell to dreaming of houses for them—not for myself. . . . I suppose my life has now taken its final turn : it has been a slow, gentle, meandering stream ; and probably I shall always live on as I do now, with the winter in London and the spring abroad and the summer and autumn in the country among my beloved pines, more than ever beloved now that John and Jane have been among them and set the place echoing down to the end of time with their silvery laughter. . . . What wonderful children visit the dreams of a childless woman, and how little wonderful they are when compared with a living child !

Ah ! well. . . . I wonder. Could any child be more to me than John and Jane ? Could I

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have found a more vivid experience of my own, more thrilling, more breathlessly alive, more full of ardent interest than I now find in the progress of my little Robins ?

I wonder. . . .

I want them to have everything. I want them to be rich and powerful. They are the sort of people to have riches and power. They could use them to breed happiness. They could set gold to spin the pure gold of human love. They could use power to disentangle the twisted web of human experience. They could do their share in cleaning up this great muddled London, where knavery at the top breeds misery and corruption and festering moral sores at the bottom. They could help to rescue England from the pitiful adventurers who exploit her wealth, and gain nothing for themselves but deadening luxury. . . .

An old wife's dream ! The flaming hope that comes to all of us when we are given the freedom of the golden age of youth.

I wonder. . . . And sometimes I feel so sure.

The book-lover declares that Robin will one day be as great as Borrow.

"He's right," he says. "He won't stand humbug."

Robin's Uncle

Robin meanwhile was content to wait. He wanted growing time. He said to me once that he felt like a man burrowing under the Alps, making a tunnel, and the odd part of it was that he was also working away at the other end of the tunnel, so that one day he should come face to face with himself.

I smiled at that, and with a sudden affectionate gesture he said :

“ You know, you have helped. . . . I don't think that success or failure matters. It is entirely my own affair—and Lucy's.”

“ And John's and Jane's and mine. It is so rarely that any one of us does come face to face with himself that it is a big thing when it happens.”

“ Houses,” he said, “ make all the difference.”

And I was pleased, as all monomaniacs are pleased when their mania seems to gain subscription.

“ Some day,” I said, “ you will be rich, and then I want Lucy to have a black room with red lacquer furniture.”

“ Oh ! ” said Robin. “ Bother money ! ”

(It was tactless of me, for he had been having rather a lean year.)

John and Jane had proved very expensive, and,

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though Robin had cut down many expenses and gone without a new dress suit for two years, and had written an incredible number of books and articles, he could not succeed in making both ends meet ; after a year in the new house one end overlapped the other by something like fifty pounds. They were not in debt, but a large hole had been made in their small reserve. Robin, moreover, had fallen upon one of those blank periods which occur in the careers of all those whose incomes are for the most part made up of irregular earnings, and there was no sign of its ever coming to an end. He was not popular, and he belonged to no coterie that could hold his work up to admiration. He had moments of dreadful depression, but Lucy pulled him through and made him feel that—

*“ Love is winged for two :
In the worst he weathers,
When their hearts are tied.
But if they divide,
Oh, too true !
Cracks a globe, and feathers, feathers,
Feathers all the ground bestrew.”*

We were all very sad, but we clung furiously to our faith and put a cheerful face on it and waited, like so many Micawbers, for something to turn up. The book-lover guessed our plight, and

Robin's Uncle

discovered that he wanted a study at the top of his house, and proposed that Lucy should furnish it for him, on commission. We discovered, however, that he was proposing to spend a preposterous amount on it, and, as we knew that he was as hard up as we were, we declined the offer, but designed his study all the same, making it, as he requested, a copy of Robin's.

The crowning disaster came when Robin's new book, over which he had laboured for many months, was declined by his publishers. He tried to serialise it, but in vain.

Mr. Doy turned up and said that he had done such an immense trade in cupboards like Lucy's little glass and latticed cupboard in her dining-room that he thought she ought to take a fee on every one he turned out. She refused, and Mr. Doy retired rather hurt. . . .

We felt stranded, as though we had been pitched high and dry above the flood of human affairs, and Robin was beginning to talk gloomily of conspiracies and plots against him. He spent many weary days going from office to office in Fleet Street, asking for any sort of work. No one wanted him, and he began to discuss grimly the question of their respective Unions. He and

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Lucy would go to the workhouse, while John and Jane would be left to me.

"Hurrah!" I said. "You'll make the workhouses pretty."

But only John and Jane laughed. They had just come in from their afternoon in Kensington Gardens, and were in the wildest spirits, and altogether impervious to the doubts and fears that were riddling the courage of their father and mother. I insisted on a game, and with a horribly forced gaiety Robin indulged in a romp. . . .

Came a ring at the bell, very imperious, very fierce, almost a little blatant. We all sat breathless and expectant, hoping that it was the editor of *The Times* come in person to ask Robin to take charge of a new supplement.

The maid announced :

"Mr. William Tunks!"

"My uncle!" said Robin, and all his nerves shrivelled up inside him. . . . This uncle, you remember, had put his foot down when the twenty-three-year-old Robin had announced his intention of marrying. He was a Master in Lunacy by profession, and as dry a little man as you will find in all the Inns of Court and the Royal Courts of Justice. He had been devoted

Robin's Uncle

to Robin's mother, who had eloped with an actor and had never been forgiven by her family, who were of that old, hard, Puritanical stock to whom forgiveness of sins was a weakness and a surrender to the devil. . . . She was deserted, and William Tunks took a little house for her in Highgate, and secretly provided for her and the boy, with whom, later, he was like a hen with only one chicken, and that a duckling. He designed his chicken for the hen-roost of the law, and when he took to the water of art his sorrow was great. When he proposed to marry without an income the old, hard Puritan leaped up in him, and he said "Go," and vowed that he would never relent. . . . However, he watched Robin's career from day to day, saw how hard he worked, made inquiries, and discovered how ill such work was paid, and when, finally, one day, he heard of the existence of John and Jane, who were such notable inhabitants of Kensington that the light of their fame could not be hid under a bushel, then he wrestled with the hard Puritan, prevailed, and came post haste.

We kept him waiting for some time down in the drawing-room while Robin pulled himself together for the encounter, and then I said :

" You must see him here. . . . You must be

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rolling on the ground, with John sitting on your head, when he comes in."

So it was arranged. Robin rolled on the ground, and John sat on his head, and presently Mr. William Tunks, Master in Lunacy, was shown in. He was a wizened little man, with a large head, black hair, a green complexion, and eyes like nothing so much as love-in-a-mist. He stood awkwardly by the door, and Lucy rose to greet him. He drew himself up stiffly, and said jerkily :

" I am your husband's uncle ! "

" I am so glad," said Lucy.

" Ahem ! " said Mr. Tunks.

Jane swaggered up to him and stood with her thumb in her mouth, goggling at him with round eyes. She does that with all the human oddities in Kensington Gardens, and is often most embarrassing.

We extricated Robin, and he shook hands with Mr. Tunks and said :

" How do you do, sir ? "

" I am very well," said Mr. Tunks.

There was an awkward silence. Jane toddled away to the toy-cupboard and produced a battered Teddy Bear, which she handed to her great-uncle as a votive offering to his worshipful oddity. He did not know that, and took it as a mark of

Robin's Uncle

civility. . . . He sat down and took Jane on his knee.

She howled, and he put her down hastily, and she went and hid her face in Lucy's skirts.

I was presented, explained my identity, and said how glad I was to see him, and also how admirable I found the little household.

"Tell me," said Mr. Tunks, "how you are getting on."

"I made six hundred last year," said Robin ;
"I doubt if I shall make four hundred this. . . ."

"Indeed . . . indeed, but you seem to get through a lot of work."

"I've got a wife and family," said Robin.

"You'd have done better to stick to the Bar."

"I might have made twenty pounds a year," said Robin.

"True. . . . True."

"I couldn't have had John or Jane or Lucy."

"True. . . . True."

"You were good enough to say that I was a blazing young fool last time we met. I hope you see now that I was right."

"Your house is very pretty. . . ."

That seemed to be the moment for me to take my leave, and I explained, as a parting shot, that,

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in my opinion, if a young man could start organising his life at twenty-three with the right sort of wife, it was better for him than to go blundering on, being a nuisance to himself and his relations until by some accident or piece of luck he should fall on his feet. . . .

Mr. Tunks said nothing, and I left them to make their peace. To my surprise, an hour later, Mr. Tunks came to see me. He explained that he had offered to continue Robin's old allowance of three hundred a year, but his offer had been rejected.

"You know," he said, "I've never seen anything like it. The boy's become a man, and I never knew such children, and the girl is splendid. . . . Have her people come round yet?"

I told him that she had not heard a word from them for four years, though they lived not two miles away.

"Shameful!" he said. "They might at least have come to see."

(I chuckled to myself.)

"I understand," he went on, "that they have accepted assistance from you from time to time. . . ."

"Oh! no. . . ."

"At any rate, they would, because you have

Robin's Uncle

been their friend from the beginning. . . . Now, if they want it, will you come to me ? ”

I agreed to that, and he looked round my room and said :

“ I live at Barnes. I've got a little garden. I love gardening. . . . But—but is it possible for anybody to have a house like yours and theirs ? ”

I seemed to feel what was in his mind, and I said :

“ It isn't only a matter of children, for I have none.”

“ Ahem ! ” said Mr. Tunks.

He was very eager and curious about it, so I showed him all my house, and in the upshot it was arranged that I should go down to visit him at Barnes and see what could be done.

My responsibilities are growing : the dog-devotee, the book-lover, Miss Doy, the Robins, Mr. Tunks.

Where will it end ?

XII

An Ugly House

“The coldness of new men’s houses.”

R. L. S.

XII

An Ugly House

I TURNED the matter over and over in my mind and at length decided that I must commit another burglary with my pen. It was all very well to have the backing of Mr. Tunks, but Robin was suffering even more from suppressed literature than from curtailed earning power. He needed more influence than he could win by his own personality. . . . Lucy's father was an important personage, and could win the ear of all sorts of social wire-pullers.

Dempsey showed me the outside of his house, and every atom of it screamed the refrain which was buzzing in its tenant's cerebellum :

“ I am a success.”

Lucy's father was, in fact, a remarkable person who had pulled himself up by sheer energy and force of will and indomitable indifference to insult from being an elementary school-teacher

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to a partnership in a great firm of solicitors, with a house in town and a place in the country and a seat in Parliament and, no one knew how, membership of two very exclusive clubs. He had motor-cars, and his eldest daughter was presented at Court, and his wife was a miserable, tired woman who had years ago given up the attempt to keep pace with his hunger for advancement. She drove in one of the motor-cars from house to house and left cards, and, if she went in, made exactly the same remarks at each, and she made the acquaintance of all the people who were coming up, and dropped the acquaintance of all the people who were going down. . . . In short, she moved wearily among the worshippers of the thing called Success, which had turned to ashes and bitterness in her hands.

Her house was very large, and everything in it was costly and beautiful, but in all the rooms there was no beauty.

I entered it burglariously one night, when I knew they would be at the Foreign Office gathering of ambassadors and bishops, and artists and politicians. I watched the policeman go round the corner, picked the lock, and entered. Two suits of armour kept the door and served as body-guard to the bust of Lucy's father, which stood

An Ugly House

half-way along the hall, announcing in its every feature :

“ I am a success.”

The stairs were in front of me, the study door to the left. The dining-room door to the right. The enormous drawing-room was on the first floor.

The hall was all tapestry and gleaming weapons and rare Chinese vases and Old Masters, labelled and lit up by carefully arranged electric lights, but it was only too plain to me that they were not there for their own sakes, but only to serve the rampant egotism of their owner. . . . And this was even more the case in the drawing-room. This was French : Louis XIV., XV., Empire. An Aubusson carpet was on the floor, Aubusson settees were at each end of the immense room ; for it was immense, as vast as the rooms which Sir William Orchardson used to paint. It was crammed to overflowing with *objets d'art et de vertu*, though art and vertu were conspicuous by their absence in the general scheme and the atmosphere. It all served no purpose save the pride of acquisition and the pride of possession. There were buhl cabinets and Sèvres tables, and French statues and a bust of Napoleon : more tapestries. There were two mantelpieces loaded with Sèvres china. The curtains were yellow : they may have

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been cloth of gold. The chairs were all gilt. The walls were crowded with pictures labelled recklessly Boucher, Van Dyck, Watteau, Rembrandt, Gainsborough, Crome, Constable. There were enough, if names could pass muster, to set the Louvre and the National Gallery screaming with envy. Only very few were beautiful. Only very, very few lit the room with the light of Art ; hardly one could bring into that room the sweet, valiant voice of the eternal *Gloria in Excelsis*. They all bore witness to no faith but the astuteness of the successful man who had brought them there and had squeezed the dealer down to his price. They expressed nothing. They brought only gloom into the house—gloom and oppression.

Three minutes of it—time enough to walk up and down the room—drove me out in search of sanity and peace of mind.

The dining-room was no better. Here, too, were pictures piled together above a heavy, aggressively opulent high wainscoting of dark walnut ; pictures in gilt frames, frowning down and giving the impression that the walls were closing in upon the room. I could not breathe, and once more I fled—to the study. Here it seemed that Lucy's father himself sought relief from his own ostentation. It was perfectly clear

An Ugly House

that a great deal of money had been spent on it, so spent that the owner could lean back in his chair and count the cost and refer back to his banking account, and think how little even such extravagance could affect the long rows of figures in the ledgers that witnessed his success. Here, however, he had been clever enough to allow himself a loophole of escape, and he had indulged in severity. He had shelves all round the room containing old books in rare bindings, rich calf and vellum, and for the most part printed in those old types which are intolerable to modern eyes, and many of them were in strange languages which, I am sure, he could not read. He had only one picture, and that a masterpiece, and one adorable modern statue by a German, most ironically representing the glory of faith in one who had lost the world and gained his own soul, though his body was reduced to gauntness, almost a skeleton, and his clothes were rags. The face of the figure was upturned, and there played about the lips a smile of resignation and contentment and acceptance. . . . "Whatever is, is right." And Lucy's father, having paid a fabulous sum for it, would slap his pockets, and think how, but for his own wonderful capacity and intelligence and industry, he might have been such a man. . . .

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There was bound to be incongruity, and it was blazoned forth in two silver salvers setting out how he had been churchwarden of a church in the eastern suburbs of London, and how he had stood for a hopeless seat in Parliament and reduced the Conservative majority by 943.

I sat in the great man's chair, and tried to feel as he must feel as he gazes at the marks of his old triumphs, and I don't remember ever having felt so hopeless or so acutely conscious of the emptiness of the world of success and failure, and I fell to wondering how my sweet Lucy could have lived and breathed in such air, and what John and Jane would make of it if they were ever brought to it. How could Lucy have lived with the Old Masters and the Sèvres and the Aubusson settees? How could she have endured being confronted by the men in armour whenever she entered the house? How could she have endured the stifling atmosphere of the dining-room, with its heavy walls and the pictures closing in from all sides? . . . And then it came to me in a flash. Lucy had revolted against it all, just as Robin had revolted against the hard Puritan in his uncle. They had come together at first in sympathy: each was seeking a gentler, sweeter way of living than that which was marked out for them. Both

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she and Robin had suffered from neglect ; both had had to fight for self-preservation ; and, therefore, both were strong enough and true enough to make life good for each other. . . . Lucy had never told me anything of the story, but it seemed plain enough to me then, and I sat sighing for the pity of it—the pity and the waste of money, energy, and the splendid opportunity that always lies between a father and daughter. I felt really burglarious in that moment and tempted to hire a pantechicon and carry away—lock, stock, and barrel—every picture, every piece of precious china, the men in armour, all the objects of art and virtu—everything, sell them, and start a Fund for the Proper Training of Millionaires, though I doubt if any man who is selfish enough to have become a millionaire can be made to realise that happiness and true wealth lie in consideration and thought for others. So many rich people are driven into wealth only because they are afraid of being poor. . . .

I had reached that point in my reflections on the sad lot of Lucy's father—how annoyed he would have been to know that anyone could think such things in his study !—when the door opened and there came in a very fashionably dressed lady of perhaps fifty. Her eyes were very kind, and

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her cheeks were just a little rouged, and she had powdered herself very hurriedly in her motor, for there was a thick little bed of it on her nose—so like Lucy's nose! She had on a magnificent brocaded gown, and an aigrette in her hair with a brooch of diamonds, diamonds round her neck and a rope of pearls, diamond ear-rings, and her fingers were ablaze with rings.

She started when she saw me, and her hand went up to her heart.

"I beg your pardon," I said. "I don't often do this sort of thing!"

"What sort of thing?"

"Reflective burglary!"

"Oh!" she gasped, and moved towards the telephone on the desk.

"Don't telephone for the police," I said. "I am only a sentimental burglar, not a criminal. . . . The last crib I cracked was Lucy's house."

"Lucy?"

"I am a friend of hers."

"Oh! Tell me . . . is she well?"

"Well . . . and very happy."

"I'm so glad of that . . . so glad of that."

"Robin," I said, "is a splendid fellow."

"Indeed?"

That made her a little frigid, and she stiffened

An Ugly House

herself, as though she expected and were warding off antagonism.

"Your house," I said, "is very wonderful."

"Yes, isn't it?" This was purely a conventional reply.

"It must make you very happy."

"Happy?" she echoed in a faint, hollow voice as though the word conveyed no meaning to her, and suddenly I was so sorry for her that I plunged brutally, and asked:

"Doesn't it?"

"I don't understand."

"I mean . . . so much success and being able to have everything you want."

"Everything I want?"

She was becoming more and more an echo, and in desperation—I was so sorry for her—I said:

"Lucy has two children."

"Two?"

"John and Jane."

"I'm glad."

"Don't you want to see them?"

"I can't forgive her."

"Why not?"

"I don't know."

"There's too much china in your drawing-room."

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"I know."

"Half the pictures are shams and the rest are wrongly named."

A gleam came into her eye.

"Are you sure of that?" she asked.

"Quite."

She drew herself up and, with pathetic pride, she almost chuckled:

"I always said so. . . . I always said he couldn't get the better of the dealers. . . . I'll tell you. I hate this house. I hate the motor-cars, and I'd give anything to go and do what Lucy did."

"You can't very well start life again," I replied; "but you can go and see Lucy and the children. You can help them."

"Are they poor?"

"Their expenses are larger than their income."

She thought over that for a long time, and then she said:

"That must be nice."

"What you have on your hands," I said, "would keep them for several years."

"Yes? . . . Isn't it awful?"

With that she asked me if I would not like to see the rest of the house, and we made the grand tour, and every now and then she would stop before

An Ugly House

some priceless treasure and say : “ Isn’t that ugly ? ”

And then she would stop before a Chinese vase and say, “ When that came, Agatha went.”

And again, before a lacquer cabinet : “ Elinor went to live by herself in Vienna soon after that arrived.”

She stopped for a long time in front of a pseudo-Ruisdael in the music-room, and at last she said :

“ I always thought that had a lot to do with poor Peter’s trouble. . . . He had to go to Australia, you know. . . . Do you think it had anything to do with it ? ”

“ I dare say.”

And, indeed, it was very clear that the more Sir Herbert’s egoism ran amok in the house the more distressing did the condition of his family become. The whole house was crammed from top to bottom with treasures over the purchase of which the great man had flattered himself that he had “ done ” the dealers. One by one he had driven his children out, and, being left with nothing but his unfortunate wife, he loaded her with jewels and bade her forget the sons and daughters she had borne him in their less prosperous days. . . . At length I was exasperated, and I said,

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as we stood on the stairs looking down at the men in armour :

“Do you know, if I were you, I should begin by burying his bust in the garden.”

“Oh ! I couldn’t do that. . . . He loves to look at it.”

“At any rate,” I said, “you can come and see what a happy house is like.”

“I will,” she said.

And with that I left her standing in that great empty house, from which Lucy had been the first to fly. I left her standing in front of the bust, squaring herself up to it, sticking out her chin, and seeming to say :

“Very well, then. . . . Very well, then. . . . I shall do it. . . . I don’t care.”

XIII

The Monk

*“Viens voir la nature immortelle
Sortir des voiles du sommeil :
Nous allons renaître avec elle
Au premier rayon du soleil.”*

ALFRED DE MUSSET.

XIII

The Monk

It is the great charm of London that in its hugeness you never know when you may not walk into romance or drama. I kept my promise with Robin's uncle, went down to his house at Barnes, and found myself swept into a region high above the common world.

The house of the Master in Lunacy was, as I expected, very dull, very dark, and very much as it had been left by his mother, with whom he had lived until her death, some years before he had taken charge of Robin.

It was rather a dear little old-fashioned, double-fronted house in a side road, with a tiny garden in front and a fairly big one at the back. It stood alone, the nearest neighbour being about a hundred yards away. Some extremely ugly iron railings and a gate reduced it to villadom. Laurels were the only plants visible in the garden. On

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the lawn at the back were a mulberry-tree and a monkey-puzzle, which to me is anathema. I am the sworn foe of the monkey-puzzle, and, whenever I can, I hew it down. It is a prickly, forbidding tree, a Nonconformist tree, and to me is typical of a certain type of British mind—such, for instance, as that of Mr. William Tunks's mother, whose portrait hung on the wall of the little drawing-room which opened into the garden with a French window. She was a descendant of the Huguenots who had settled in Wandsworth after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and, though they had intermarried, had preserved their race, hardened, however, by the admixture of the unyielding temper of the British middle class. Her face was very strong, almost Dantesque; her mouth was a hard, straight line; her eyes were small, under heavy lids; and her brow was narrow and fanatical. In the portrait she was wearing a stiff bodice of black silk, armoured with jet beads, a widow's collar, and a heavy cap of crape and linen. . . . She dominated the room, and her eyes followed you wherever you went; they must have been the terror of an imaginative child like Robin. Facing her was a portrait of Longfellow, and on the wall, opposite the window, above a heavy sideboard of mahogany, hung

The Monk

Munkácsy's melodramatic picture of "Christ before Pilate," in a 3-inch frame. As a foil to this was a photograph of Canova's "Cupid and Psyche," bought probably by some member of the family on a visit to the Italian lakes. The furniture, incredibly enough, was horsehair and mahogany inlay, and the chairs were hung with lace antimacassars. There were lace curtains to the windows and green Venetian blinds. The table was round and covered with a red and white check tablecloth. . . . The only thing that saved the room from its inhuman, sacrilegious gloom was a plentiful litter of pipes, a collection of sixpenny fiction and cheap romance, and a photographic group of a number of young men in cricketing flannels, with Mr. Tunks standing at one end in his capacity of Hon. Treasurer.

I was shown into this room by a voluble old housekeeper, who was filled with excitement at the news that I was a friend of Mr. Robin. In five minutes she gave me a résumé of all the family history, told me she had been thirty-five years in service in that house, and added, with a stealthy upward glance at the grim widow :

"There's been quite enough unforgiveness in the family."

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“What can you expect,” said I, “if you live with Longfellow and Munkácsy ?”

“She did what she thought right,” said the old woman.

“No doubt.”

The Master in Lunacy came in from the garden, and expressed his pleasure at seeing me. We went into the garden. It was growing towards late evening, and a marvellous pageant was in the arranging for the setting of the sun. It was such a sky as, I believe, is only to be seen in the neighbourhood of London, where the smoke-veiled colours take on a richness and a depth like that of the old paintings or the dyes in an ancient Eastern rug. The red brick of the houses near by were tinged to a deep orange, and there were windows all ablaze with the apricot-coloured sunlight. . . . The garden was like hundreds of other gardens—neat, formal, unimaginative. There was no corner in it that showed the smallest sign of any indulgence in caprice. I am prepared to swear that there was not a single weed on bed or path, and that there was no arrangement of the flowers in beds not in accordance with the prescriptions of an antiquated text-book.

“Have you,” I said, “ever heard of Mr. Robinson ?”

The Monk

"Oh, yes. . . . He's an eccentric."

"He is a liberator."

"What!" said Mr. Tunks. "Not Jabez Balfour?"

I laughed at that.

"Oh, no a liberator of mankind."

We made a tour of the garden, and I found it so dull that I was determined, as soon as possible, to set it right, and to arrange it so that the flowers might be happier and more free, and that there might be here and there an element of surprise.

"First," I said, "you must cut down the monkey-puzzle tree."

"It has always been there," said the Master in Lunacy.

"It is very ugly and it obscures the view of the mulberry-tree, which is very beautiful."

"I never thought of that."

I told him that in my own garden in the country I was always finding trees which were in the way, obscuring finer trees, and therefore usurping light and air and the nourishment of the earth.

"I suppose you're right. Yes. You do make one see things in a new way."

I told him then about Lucy's mother.

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“Poor woman!” he said. “Poor woman! Yes. I’ve noticed that with selfish men.”

Having begun on the business of regeneration, I condemned his scarlet geraniums and his lobelias and his sunflowers, and I believe that, no matter how fantastic I had become, he would have agreed with me. . . . We walked under the shade of the mulberry-tree, and then we came on a shadowy figure sitting brooding and huddled.

“My cousin,” said the Master in Lunacy.

The figure rose and revealed itself as a monk in a brown habit with the cowl drawn over his face. He stood with his head bowed, and I made the conventional remark.

“My cousin,” said the Master in Lunacy, “is a member of the Cistercian Order, and has for many years been living in a monastery in France. He has come to England to investigate the possibility of establishing a house in the neighbourhood of Richmond Park. He and I were boys together, and he used to stay in this house for weeks.”

“How interesting!” I said.

“I do not see,” said the monk, “how any honest man can do anything but protest against the modern order of society. My protest took the form of complete withdrawal from it.”

The Monk

"That," I said, "does not seem likely greatly to affect the modern order of society."

"True," said the monk, "but it is recorded by the Most High, who sees and understands all things."

"Surely, then, it is possible," I replied, "that He will see and understand modern society. And to understand is to forgive. Modern society has proved itself too strong for you in France."

"That is a crime and an act of tyranny."

"Maybe, but beneath all the corruption and all the insane dishonesty of society, there is a striving and a desire to have religion brought into closer touch with life. Don't you think the churches are very largely responsible for the present lamentable state of affairs by their persistent refusal through centuries to suffer religion to be a part of life ? "

"The politicians are to blame."

"The politicians blame the churchmen."

"They abuse their power."

"Have not the churchmen abused their power when they had it ? "

"The people," said the monk, "must have guidance."

"Certainly," I said ; "but to make them believe in a religion apart from and above their

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daily life, or to deny them religion and make them regard their daily life as purposeless and materialistic is to leave them a prey to hypocrisy and knavery. . . . And that, I suggest, is exactly what has happened."

The monk drew back his cowl to reveal a face of remarkable sweetness and beauty, with a fine brow and eyes of a peculiar penetration.

"I believe," he said, "in the redemption of the world by sacrifice. By withdrawal from the world a man sacrifices all the possibilities of which in his youth he dreamed. By removing himself from temptation and all the exhaustion and all the polluting influences of the world he wins freedom for himself, and, in contemplation, can liberate his soul so that it soars upwards to the highest mysteries. If the soul is individual, then the liberation of one man is clear gain, and its sacrifice is an act of redemption; it is another breach in the barrier that lies between humanity and immortal life. . . . If, on the other hand, the soul is collective, then that part of it which is set free to soar in the mind and spirit of such a man as myself must cast back a radiance on the whole; it must, as it were, direct a new stream of clear water into the muddy channels of human experience. . . . You see that

The Monk

I avoid dogma in my desire to express my faith clearly."

"Faith," said I, "is a good thing; but I believe that there is a simpler way, a kinder, a more charitable, a warmer, a more generous way. I agree with you as to sacrifice; but I believe that life, when it is lived at its topmost, is a perpetual sacrifice, not the final and irrevocable act, but a succession of acts from minute to minute. Marriage, for instance, calls for sacrifice hour by hour between husband and wife. The advent of children calls for sacrifice, and it ill betides those who do not meet the demands made of them. The sacrifice that serves the world is the sacrifice of self, not that of life. . . ."

"It is asking too much of men."

"That may be. It is not I who ask it, but Nature."

"The mind of man is above Nature."

"The mind of man is subject to Nature's law of death."

"It is impossible," said the monk, "for women ever to comprehend the hunger of men for spiritual freedom."

"Women strongly object," said I, "to a spiritual freedom which condemns them to slavery and unfulfilment."

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"Women also may renounce the world."

"A great many of them do; a great many are renounced by the world."

Mr. Tunks scratched his head.

"It seems to me," he said, "that people talk a great deal of nonsense about women which falls to the ground as soon as they apply it to their own mothers and sisters and wives."

"Quite right," said I, "and I don't think your cousin and I will ever convince each other if we go on arguing till Doomsday."

"The world," said the monk, "is served by the elect few. The rest don't matter."

"Nonsense," said I. "The rest provide the people to be served by the elect few, and it ought to be our business to see that the people they provide are worth serving."

"I give it up," said the Master in Lunacy.

The monk drew his cowl over his head again. It was almost dark.

*"The moon put forth a little diamond peak
No bigger than an unobserved star,
Or tiny point of fairy scimitar."*

There was a black mane of clouds across the Milky Way, and afar off we could hear the roar of London, the vast city which the monk in his hopeless renunciation ignored, the mighty aggre-

The Monk

gation of houses which, it seemed to me, might one day be relieved of its distress by the changing of the conditions in which the people were born, lived, and died, though my attempt upon it might seem to be like trying to cut a way through a tropical forest with a pocket-knife.

We left the monk and went into the house, where the Master in Lunacy asked me to make of it such a place as could be visited by John and Jane without their being overawed and crushed by the prevailing gloom. He had been most impressed by our nursery, and, I believe, would have been quite willing for me to plaster his dining-room with pictures of "The Red Etin of Ireland" and "The Three Bears."

Fortunately, the portrait of Robin's grandmother was a very fine picture, and would lose half its terrors when its surroundings were changed. Longfellow was dispatched, and Munkácsy was sold for half a crown. The horsehair furniture was covered with chintz and supplied with cushions. The red-check table cloth was presented to the housekeeper, and the table, which was quite a fine piece of mahogany, was left bare. The wall between the dining-room and hall was taken down, and a very nice room was made.

This was panelled from ceiling to floor with

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white wood, and the staircase and doors and window-frames, etc., were also painted white. The fireplace already there was a nice old-fashioned one of the Chippendale period, and that was accordingly left, but the windows, which must originally have had small panes of glass, had been "improved" by some Goth into plate glass and dullness. These were restored to their old charm, and the lace curtains and Venetian blinds were replaced with chintz and plain net.

I found Mr. Tunks rather difficult concerning the furniture. He had got so used to the ugly early Victorian pieces; but finally we compromised. He was allowed to keep the horsehair chairs. I was allowed to change the heavy old sideboard for something lighter and less cumbersome—something that would go with the wainscoting. This I eventually ran to earth in an old shop in Guildford. A really beautiful piece of carved Chippendale, and worthy of the fine old Sheffield plate which, with the aid of the house-keeper, I had unearthed from a rusty old chest. The chairs matched the sideboard, and the floor was stained and beeswaxed, with a Persian rug in the middle. The stairs which mounted up from the dining-hall were carpeted with grey Axminster and furnished with black rods.

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Now for the study. This was the most important room in the house, for it was here that the Master in Lunacy spent most of his leisure.

It was a pleasant, long, low room with a window opening on to the garden. The sun streamed into it practically all day long. Therefore it stood in no need of being kept light by its decorative scheme, like the dining-room, which only had the sun in the morning, so that I was able to have the bookshelves of oak. They were about 4 feet in height, and went entirely round the room. The fireplace was an open one with a dog grate, and the inside of the fireplace was distempered a deep orange-red. The curtains were of the same colour, and they toned well with the oak. There was dark brown felt on the floor and some nice old rugs. A large sofa stood at one side of the fire, and some comfortable arm-chairs and a big table covered with books and writing appurtenances were the only other furniture in the room. The walls above the book-cases were covered with a thick paper of deep cream, and opposite the fireplace hung Mr. Tunks's mother, not a little amazed, I expect, at her new surroundings, and staring very indignantly at the old prints which had been collected from other parts of the house, and in their black frames

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looked particularly well above the bookcases. We ransacked the upper rooms : had one white, for Lucy, with a wall-paper of little bunches of roses, and curtains and bedspread to match ; one blue and one rose. The blue room had white, narrow-striped paper, blue curtains and bedspread, and carpet ; and the rose room curtains of chintz covered with roses, walls of coarse white canvas, white bedspread with a rose border, and a warm brown carpet. Each of these rooms had bookshelves fitted into recesses or running round the walls, comfortable armchairs, and tables fitted with writing materials.

The only room in the house we did not touch was the little den inhabited by the old servant, who kept there all her treasures, her master's old walking-stick, books presented her by various members of the family, three pairs of boots (square-toed and elastic-sided, that had been worn by Robin's grandfather). She pleaded for Longfellow, and he took up his abode with her. . . . The bedroom of the Master in Lunacy was also left very much as it was. A new carpet, new curtains, and a roomy arm-chair were the only invasions, and I could see that the dear man was exceedingly grateful for this concession. It is queer how men cling to the things they have

The Monk

got used to—so different from women, who are always ready entirely to reconstruct no matter what it may be—rooms, houses, gardens, themselves. . . . One room was turned into a play-room for John and Jane, whom the Master in Lunacy proposed to invite to stay with him for weeks together in the summer, so that they should be out of the London heat.

Week after week Mr. Tunks and I laboured, and created a fruit garden, two wide herbaceous borders, an annual border, an Alpine garden, and a courtyard, and we banished villadom for ever.

Best of all, one day he confided to me that under his mother's will he had received also his unforgiven sister's share, and, that being so, could I not persuade Robin to allow it to be settled on John and Jane?

"I've been thinking of it," said he, "ever since that night when you talked to my cousin, the monk. He may be right, but I don't see how he is ever going to know that he is. And if we were all to wait and do nothing, there'd be an end of half the people in the world. I prefer your way, and I want to help. . . ."

"You shall," said I.

And within a month John and Jane were persons of wealth and substance.

XIV

London Shops

*"I wander through each charter'd street,
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow,
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe."*

BLAKE.

XIV

London Shops

It seems that the great shops in London can only maintain their existence by swelling and growing and eating up all the little shops like great dog-fish gobbling up a shoal of herrings. There are instances of this character of a whole neighbourhood being altered and perhaps uplifted by the growth of a little draper's or grocer's shop into a store with half a mile of frontage and acres upon acres of flooring. It is possibly a good thing, but it seems to me to take away half of the fun of shopping, and a great deal of the fun of shop-window gazing, an amusement in which Dempsey and I extensively indulge. . . . We pretend that we have been given fifty pounds to spend in an afternoon, and we go from window to window choosing full value for our money. As a matter of fact we spend very little money in this way on clothes. What we chiefly look out

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for are presents for anybody and everybody, from Dempsey's landlady to the book-lover; and Dempsey even goes so far as to go to the person for whom she has selected a certain article and to tell him or her that she bought it "in her mind." And Dempsey's "mind presents" give almost as much pleasure as though they had materialised into an actual offering. . . .

The best and worst of the world sooner or later comes to London, and the less money you have the more important it is that you should buy the best with it. That needs careful consideration, selection, a clear determination as to what it is that you want, and, as the advertisements are perpetually enjoining, a firm refusal to accept something that is "just as good." If you want a Chippendale bureau it is weakness to come away with an Empire. With patience and a little trouble you can find what you want—even though you have to go to the Caledonian Market for it, a form of shopping which in the Londoner is equivalent to the country woman's mania for attending auctions and bidding for oddments. The great thing is, if you are shopping for household purposes, always to buy something that is good of its kind, and in course of time it is bound to become useful, as in the case of that aunt of

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Lucy's, who never bought anything but the best and left enough to furnish Lucy's first house with curtains and cushion-covers and draperies throughout. I myself have by me an always growing collection of stuffs and metals and old pieces of furniture, which invariably find their uses in one or another of my campaigns. The dog-devotee, the book-lover, and the Master in Lunacy were all supplied from my store, and I had the double satisfaction of making presents and also of having my system justified. With my belongings I was expanding into a number of households and extending my sphere of action in the world.

In the winter, when I am in London, it is one of my chief pleasures to visit Oxford Street or Knightsbridge, or the Brompton Road or Regent Street, and mingle with the crowd and gaze into the lighted windows, and mark the fashions, the ingenuity of the window-dressing, and the shrillness of the methods of attracting notice ; sometimes it is a delight to pause before a window that is arranged with dignity and art as a relief from its plethoric neighbours ; but always I am oppressed by the long, long rows of windows of the great stores, leviathans, whose huge bulk shatters all self-consequence in a customer. Though

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shop-walkers and salesmen bow and suavely demand your wishes, yet all the while there is the unhappy consciousness of shopping *in a crowd*. One person is of no more consequence than another. The directors think in thousands when they consider their public, in sixteenths of a penny when they calculate their prices and the profits they must make to pay their shareholders a dividend. It is magnificent, it is wonderful, it is appalling. It gives me the same dreadful feeling of helplessness that once I had when I was taken to the engine-room of a great steamer. I felt then that surely we had let loose upon the world something so monstrous that it must breed insanity, and here, too, I felt that this vast machine of commerce, crushing individuality in its employees, demanding a frightful mental strain from its directors and managers, forcing its customers into impersonality—regarding them only as so many purses disgorging coin—must produce a sort of impassivity and a sort of recklessness bred of indifference and incapacity to take in any human impression. . . . I am too prone to take a human interest, always to regard every creature fashioned in the semblance of man or woman as a human being. I am unable with any peace of mind to regard all the employees in Messrs.

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X——'s or Y——'s Stores as cogs in a machine, and, if they are machines with no sense of the purpose fulfilled by the whole, if they have no grasp of the ramifications of the concern, if the seller of lace has no notion of his inter-departmental relationship, then I am face to face with something which beggars understanding and faith, something cruel, something monstrous, something destructive. And yet it is impossible to believe that human nature can ever be organised out of its stubborn, resisting quality. . . . On the other hand, it seems rational to believe that organisation will be carried to such a pitch that in the end it will provide a higher average of individual freedom, if it has not already, in fact, begun to produce that result. Unorganised commerce can produce an even more disastrous state of affairs, as a grim little story I can tell will show.

Harry Blow was a postman who married a housemaid in good service. She was given a wedding present of thirty pounds, and about the same time he received a legacy of two hundred pounds. He threw up his position and purchased a small miscellaneous shop, where he sold tobacco, newspapers, and confectionery. It was very hard work, and the profits were small.

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Neither man nor wife could afford to neglect the shop. They had a child, and their work took up so much of their time that they could not give it a proper airing, and, in their ignorance, they left it for hours together in a perambulator in the parlour. The child lost the use of its legs, could not walk, fell ill, swallowed up their small store of money, and after two years they had to abandon their enterprise and take what work they could get.

When I think of that I regard the big stores with a more favourable eye. No doubt their employees are paid very little; but, at any rate, they are kept out of the way of the harm they may do themselves by their greed, their vanity, and their ignorance.

All that is a social problem to which I pay no heed when I have money in my purse, and am really out for the pleasure of buying. Nearly always I avoid the sales. The heated rush and flurry, the scramble and loss of temper all round have no charms for me. I never buy for the mere sake of making a bargain, and am never to be caught up in the periodical frenzy which seizes so many of my friends. Sometimes I see in a window a precious brocade, or a piece of lace, or some fine embroidery at one-fourth its ostensible

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market value, and then I plunge in coolly and determinedly and make straight for the object of my desires. Once or twice in the exhibition at Earl's Court or Shepherd's Bush I have marked desirable things, made note of their purchaser at the close of the exhibition, and tracked them down. With some years of experience I fancy I do know where to find what I want when I want it; it is so much a matter of experience that it has become a knack, and so much do I trust to my instinct that I have never yet passed a desirable piece of furniture or stuff or dress material—something that I felt at the time must and should be mine—without regretting it, and sooner or later coming upon the exact occasion for the lost bargain. I have my own system of shopping, and the average shop is not conducted to cater for me and my like. Advertisements of every kind attract the public, and when they are there the excellence of the articles exposed is expected to carry the business through and effect a purchase. (Probably there is only a limited number of people who buy in sheer terror or because they are ashamed to go out of a shop without having bought anything.) Now here, at any rate, in the matter of dress, many of the shops make a vast mistake. Nothing charms like variety, but dresses

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are designed in Paris and reproduced in thousands and thousands of copies of one model. No woman likes to be seen wearing a costume identical in all essentials with that of another woman, and yet very often in the shops you may see a dozen or more frocks in different materials all exactly the same in design, and thereby calculated to repel rather than to attract custom. Only a very little ingenuity would be needed to make the dozen frocks different enough to overcome the difficulty, and, though it might cost the customer a little more, I am certain it would result in better trade and fewer costumes being marked down for the sales. . . . I have myself frequently been checked on the point of buying a pretty frock by the realisation that the first time I wore it I might in all probability find myself sitting next to it at lunch.

In another way the same monotony of exhibition is calculated to check the purchase of almost every commodity. You cannot standardise taste, but you can differentiate between the frankly common and ugly, and the possibly good and beautiful. If they are all mixed up together the most likely result is the sale of neither. I cannot, of course, speak except from my own experience, and to a certain extent from observation; but I

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can instance the extraordinary difficulty in choosing presents at Christmas. The very multitude of articles presented for choice is a discouragement, and, if you fall back on books, your plight is no better, unless you are one of the very few who follow the reviews and the publishers' announcements. The vast outpouring of books is bewildering to the ordinary mind, and the booksellers' shops afford no assistance, their catalogues offer no distinction, and, having once or twice accepted the empty "best seller," distrust is awakened, and you fall back on the established poets, or the collected editions of the early novelists. (My stock present is Jane Austen.) Perhaps with books that is inevitable, but I cannot believe it. I am only amazed, when I see the booksellers' and library catalogues, that books are bought at all, only comforted by the reflection that the best in each generation does seem to survive. Perhaps the marketing of books and works of art is more difficult and complicated than that of anything else, and perhaps I am biased and not seeing the thing clearly because my method of shopping does not hold good there.

I like to spend ten pounds a year in books, which I believe to be an absolute necessity for the modern man and woman, and the spending of

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that ten pounds is more worry to me than the whole of the rest of my income. Book-buying is an art, I fancy, which can only be acquired by men, because they have so little traffic with other kinds of shops that they can have the leisure to develop the requisite knowledge and skill. Men do not have to learn the geography of the great stores, nor do they have to know the price of beef or potatoes or kitchen towelling.

To shop alone is detestable. One needs support. To a certain extent one needs the critical eye and the restraining presence of a friend to keep one from falling a victim to commercial dodges and seductive advertisements. My most frequent companion is Dempsey, who likes my plan of shopping and, though she has no money, is anxious to cultivate the art of it. . . . She is allowed sixpence a week—when her mother remembers the cheque for the landlady of the close-packed house; but, as her mother's memory is erratic, cheques arrive every four or five months only, and the sixpences are regularly irregular. However, she helps me to spend, and that is just as good, for now she regards herself as living much more in my house than in the lodgings over the way; and when I buy new finger-bowls, or a new china tea-set, or some pieces of brocade for cushion

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covers, her pride in the rightness of the purchase far exceeds my own, and she has a much keener eye than I have for a toy for John and Jane, or a new garment for Miss Doy's baby, which appeared on the scene some months ago. . . . (It is a little girl, and is called Lucy, and she is so huge that she weighs as much as Jane and John put together when they were her age.) . . . We have no favourite shops, and we wander in and out of them all with equal indifference, and incidentally we wander in and out of the various strata of society, which for commercial purposes seems to be divided into three sections—north, middle, and south, or good, better, best. As a matter of fact, the best people, commercially speaking, seem to shop everywhere, flying about in their motors; but the pedestrians do fall into the aforesaid sections, of comparative merit. On the down grade the comparatives are not enough; there are innumerable imperceptible shades and degrees, from the cheap stores of the clerkly classes down to the little general corner shop of the lower, and the street stalls and barrows of the lowest. The shops that have the most fascination for me are those which sell old furniture and brass. The dirtier they are the more enjoyable I find them. I came across a beautiful wardrobe

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in one of them some time ago. It was hidden away behind a lot of other things, covered with dust, in a dark corner. To-day it is worth twice what I gave for it. There are always choice pieces to be found if one has the time to search. You must put on an old frock and not mind toiling up and down innumerable stairs, mostly in the dark, or penetrating into regions at the back of the shop, where a broom or a duster are unknown. It is worth all the trouble if you are really in love with what you are doing; but, if you are not, then it is best to go to the orthodox establishments, where everything is kept spotlessly clean and immaculately bright, and you sit luxuriously in a soft seat while attendants arrange things for your inspection. This may be very comfortable, but it is not nearly so amusing. You pay more, but don't get so much fun for your money.

Another shop I always find extremely interesting is the little dry-goods store. In Kensington there are many of them, and they all seem to do a thriving trade. I think everybody patronises them, from the Greek millionaire on the hill-top to the glass-cutter by the church. Everything is to be found in them that can be called dry—soap, glue, japan black, ironmongery, china, beeswax, oil, paint, brushes, and a variety of

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casseroles. They also sell jam and pickles and sweets of a cheap and nasty kind, and when Dempsey gets her sixpence she takes an assortment of her fellow-inmates of the close-packed house and distends them with quantities of Victorian mixture which has nothing to recommend it except that a quarter of a pound can be bought for a penny. *Æsthetically*, these sweets are barbaric; *hygienically*, I should fancy them to be noxious in the extreme. So far as I know, however, they have not reduced the population of Dempsey's house.

One day Dempsey came flying to me to tell how a gorgeous Daimler limousine had stopped at the Robins' house; and how Lucy's mother had stepped out of it, and how she had stayed there for an hour, and how Lucy had come out with her, and how they had kissed, and how——. Without even troubling to put on a hat—(we can do these things in Kensington)—I rushed round with Dempsey and found Lucy in tears, with John and Jane hugged close to her breast, and Robin very angry, pacing up and down, and saying he had put his hand to the plough and would drive the share through to the end of the furrow, and how it was so like people to turn up just when the fight was ending.

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"Just," said I—"just when you need a shove."

"Eh?" said Robin.

"Just when you can't afford to waste any more time and energy."

"She was so nice about it," said Lucy.

"Of course she was," I cried, and I turned on Robin and rent him.

"She oughtn't to have come without the old man knowing."

"Rubbish!" said I; and Robin was forced to agree that it was rubbish. The great thing was that Lucy's mother had come, that she was charmed with her daughter, delighted with her grandchildren, and had purred with pleasure over the house, in which she found a quality for which, poor soul, she had been hungering these many, many years—the quality of simplicity. . . .

She came again, very mysterious this time. Lucy and I were packed into the Daimler, and for the first time I knew the luxury of shopping in a motor, and the greater bliss of buying with unlimited means. We were conspirators. Lucy's mother had been stirred to revolt and had resolved to have her boudoir furnished by us so that she might have a sanctuary against the vanities of this wicked world. Unfortunately, her frame of mind was rather that of the Book of Eccle-

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siastes than of the Psalms or the heroic passages of the Book of Job ; but that mattered very little to us. We were given *carte blanche*, smuggled into the great house, told that we could reject or retain as we pleased. There were "treasures" in her boudoir, but the furniture was almost all debased Empire, and we dismissed it on the nod. . . . It was not an easy room. It was larger than any I had been called upon to handle. It was square, very lofty, and lit with an immense flat window. . . .

Could I build out a round window with leaded panes and casements so as to give her a window seat ?

I could. (Sir Herbert was away for a couple of months in America.)

I said "White."

Lucy said "Pale grey. Pale grey and mauve and a little fine old red."

"But your mother," said I, "wants to copy your grapes, and I am most anxious to try an effect of a standard vine growing up from the floor and extending for a yard or two on either side."

"All white ?" said she.

"Yes, all white ; the walls—if they are good enough—left bare and distempered white, or, if

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not, with a very coarse canvas stretched over it, and also distempered white."

"It sounds rather nice," said Lucy; then, after some consideration:

"Don't you think it would be better to leave that for my new drawing-room?"

"Your new drawing-room! Are you, then, thinking of moving?"

"No," said Lucy, "not just yet, but presently, perhaps. You know, you never can tell."

"No," replied I, "you never can." I wondered whether my Lucy was wanting to make a corner in grapes.

"You see," she continued, "mother will always be able to see them when she comes to us."

And there we left it, and pale grey was decided on. A builder was called in, whose estimate made me gasp. They got to work on the window, and we spent all day and every day in the motor, no longer shopping *in the crowd*, but everywhere being provided with a whole retinue of salesmen and the most august of shop-walkers. We selected a splendid black Wilton carpet—or, rather, we gave the order for it to be dyed black, for we could not find it in stock.

Lucy planned the fireplace, and we hunted for

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three days for the one we wanted, and at last ran it to earth in a shop in Bond Street, which I should as soon have thought of entering before as of assaulting the Prime Minister in the Suffrage cause. When I first entered I felt curiously shabby and poverty-stricken. We were attended by a man whose name is often in the papers as giving thousands of pounds for a picture or a collection of china. He did not look at all remarkable, but he was enthusiastic about the mantelpiece, and I always admire enthusiasm, especially in the middle-aged. He had bought it, he said, when one of the old houses in a Bloomsbury square was being turned, with a number of others, into chambers. That may or may not have been true, but the mantelpiece was very beautiful, very simple, very dignified, and just what we wanted—which, after all, is the main point. It was of marble, of several delicate colours, and with two slender black columns. The grate was of fine steel. I had found it during one of my dusty peregrinations through a shop filled from ceiling to floor with old furniture and brass and steel and iron. Here also were found the fire-irons and the long-legged muffin-holder, which gave a touch of homeliness to it all. Around the room there was already some low panelling,

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and this we left, painting it and the rest of the woodwork a pale grey. Above was hung a grey paper, and this was covered with silver leaf and brushed over with charcoal, very lightly, to give the effect of oxidised silver. The furniture was of no particular period. Charles II. rubbed shoulders with Queen Anne, and Chippendale and Sheraton glanced shyly at each other across the room. But every piece was engaged in the general conspiracy of comfort. There were six electric lights fitted on the ceiling, and here the marble bowls I found in Florence came into requisition. They were beautifully carved with dancing cupids, holding swags of flowers and fruit, and they shed a nice, soft light. Another of a different design, a complete ball, stood on a table near the fireplace. We chose a grey silk for the curtains, lined with a deep mauve, and this also did service for the window seat. One large sofa was grey, with great cushions, some of grey and some of mauve. For another smaller sofa we got a fine old red silk, and this had purple chiffon cushions lined with red. Lucy's mother by this time was almost as excited as we were, and, I discovered, had quite a pretty taste in pictures, and her old boudoir had been hung with delightful old prints and engravings, and, strangest of

London Shops

all, two or three Conders. This taste of hers had been strong enough to withstand the alien invasion of the house, and served in a measure to account for Lucy's quickness and rightness of feeling.

Only by the narrowest of shaves did we manage to get it done within the two months of her husband's absence. Then it was planned that it should be left for him to discover and to make inquiries. However, Bevan, the butler, who had been with them for ten years, let the cat out of the bag as soon as he saw his master by blurting out :

"Miss Lucy's been here, sir, looking so well and happy."

"God bless my soul!" said Sir Herbert; and though Lucy's mother had spent a sleepless night, turning and turning over in her mind how she could break it to him and broach a subject which they had not mentioned for years, he cut the ground from under her feet by asking her brusquely, though with unexpected kindness :

"Why on earth didn't you go and see them before?"

When I was told of his amiability, my mind leapt to a smallish room that led out of the boudoir, for a long-treasured scheme of mine.

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This was to make a black room, with red lacquer furniture and a ceiling of oxidised silver. The curtains for the room I had already met in the silk department of a famous draper's store, where they were displayed as dress material. They were of heavy black silk, lined with roses of every shade of red, and they were the *trouvaille* which makes a vague and hazily imagined scheme leap forth so vividly in the mind that not to execute it is to live in torture.

I must make myself very charming to Lucy's father.

XV

Fortune

“Nul effort n'est vain.”

ROMAIN ROLLAND.

XV

Fortune

THERE is nothing more trying in the world than the artificial sort of altruism, distilled, as I verily believe, from no experience, but from much reading of trite and foolish books setting forth rules of conduct which fit human nature about as well as a baby's smock will fit an undergraduate. I know women who cannot enter any company without in their behaviour seeming to demonstrate to all and sundry how to be the perfect wife, the perfect mother, the perfect friend, and the perfect guest, while all the time it is nothing but the ridiculous posturing of the blind, never dreaming of the different complexion put upon the world for those who can see and have seen. Such a woman makes every virtue in the code, whether she has it or not, minister to the rites which she is for ever performing in adoration of her own perfection. . . . There is so much of

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this posturing in the world that the placid, the ordinary, and the unimaginative are apt to lose patience, and to see nothing more than this in a genuine enthusiasm, and, as the enthusiast cannot stop to placate or reply to criticism, there is much misunderstanding and futile friction.

To avoid any such, let me hasten to say that my habit of burglary is no greater offence than that of a child who grows out of its clothes. I cannot help it. Fate has ordained that I should live alone, in a little house, with limited means, so that, if I am to keep myself in even tolerable good spirits I must find my way into the lives and houses of other people, and there I take more than I give ; for instance, the decoration of Lady ——'s boudoir lifted me to a higher sphere in which I could dream bolder schemes and more audacious combinations than I had ever dared to conceive in my pedestrian days. There is really something exalting and ennobling in moving swiftly in a box on wheels, so much time and energy is saved. All my ideas and notions concerning luxury have had to be re-cast, and I am beginning to see that it is like everything else, good or bad, according as it is used or abused. Poverty is in itself no more good than riches. Good or bad lie wholly in use or abuse. Even

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genius is a bad thing when it is abused, and the regeneration of the world does not seem to me to be the simple affair that once it did—even by the introduction of simplicity and colour into drab houses. . . . All of which is not to say that I recant. That endures while I endure : only I have been rudely shaken by the idiotic whims of Fortune, which have made me realise how irrationally this world is conducted.

No sooner was Robin pardoned and taken to live under the shadow of his father-in-law's success than all his difficulties fell to the ground. Editors treated him with respect : his publisher accepted the book which before he had rejected, puffed and paragraphed it into something like a success ; short stories which he had written years before were taken out of his drawers and sold ; and a play which had been going the round of the theatres for three years was accepted for immediate production. Robin accepted no money from his father-in-law : he did not need to. The word "Success" was associated with his name, and forthwith the thing itself, or something like it, followed. His work was the same, with the sole difference that it had a commercial guarantee.

The play gave me the great opportunity of my lifetime. Robin, at Lucy's suggestion, inserted

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a clause in the agreement that I was to have the designing of the costumes and the scenery, which I have always believed to play a great, though subsidiary, part in theatrical success. . . . In the theatre it is the business of all the artists concerned to satisfy first the eye and then the ear. The eye takes in the action and design; while the ear, being satisfied by the rightness of the dialogue and the ejaculations, sighs, sobs, and laughter with which the actors convey their emotions, endorses the pleasure which the eye has taken. If the eye is offended the ear enters upon its task with prejudice in the brain behind it. . . . Now, in the majority of the stage productions which I have seen of late years the rooms are rigid, ugly in colouring, conventional, and altogether unlike any room that is ever lived in. The furniture is always aggressively new and very miscellaneous, while the characters are dressed like tailors' models and dressmakers' mannequins—as, to a certain extent, they are, for the stage is used by the tailoring and dress-making trades, quite legitimately, for the purposes of advertisement. The trouble is that in the purely commercial managements the atmosphere of the play and the characters of the persons in it are altogether lost sight of, and the

Fortune

play itself must suffer in its entertaining capacity. Charming people should live in charming rooms, and charming characters should be presented in charming clothes. In many productions scenery, furniture, and costumes convey nothing but the fact that the characters must be very rich, and, though that is flattering to the audience, it is bad taste, and is an appeal to their baser instincts. The probabilities are against a duke being vulgar, and very much in favour of his having good manners, whatever else he may be. In any case, it is not right in any art, much less in theatrical art, with its direct and potent power of giving the most vivid impressions, to display the baseness of life without its dignity. There should be dignity even in a farce. There is dignity in the farces of Shakespeare.

Here was work worth the doing, work for which my experience with Lady ——'s vast boudoir had been a capital discipline and preparation; work which, in its effect, would influence not one or two people only, but, in varying degrees, the thousands of people who would see the play if it were a success. The dressmakers guide taste through the stage, why should not the house-decorators do the same? And I reflected that the better I served the

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play the more powerful would be the appeal of my designs.

I read the play again. Robin read it to me aloud, and I had the various actresses to visit me. The manager was very unhappy about it until I explained that I had spent three years on the stage as a girl and was therefore not entirely ignorant about what I was doing. . . . I did not tell him that I was doing the very thing I had been itching to do for many years. That would have alarmed him.

The play was a modern comedy in three acts, the action taking place in two rooms in a house in Belgravia. As a matter of fact, I copied and adapted Lucy's drawing-room, even down to the frieze of grapes, for one room, and took the pale grey, mauve, and tomato-red of Lady ——'s boudoir for the other, making a feature of the round window. The only drastic alteration I allowed myself in the first was to replace the back wall with a long, low window with leaded panes, so as to give the scene painter an opportunity for colour with a back cloth of London houses under a deep blue sky, and the characteristic effect of plane trees lit up by the light of a street lamp. We arrived not at exact realisation, but at giving the illusion that the people on the stage were real

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people living in a real room. The simplicity needed in an actual house is as nothing to the simplicity required on the stage, where the non-essential and over-elaboration almost infallibly destroy illusion. . . . There is a school of production which discards the aim of illusion altogether and invites the public to see nothing but scenery and tricks of lightning, and a certain section of the public like it, though I doubt if anybody can go and sit in the theatre for three hours without creating for himself an illusion or a series of illusions. My point is that it is the business of the artist to create the illusion, and not that of the audience. It is the business of the audience, and its pleasure, to respond to the lead given by the artist.

Though I was determined to show charming people in charming rooms, yet I was determined also, if the thing should go any further, not to depict ugly people in ugly rooms. A villainous deed gains in villainy by being enacted in a beautiful setting. A play compounded of ugly people and ugly deeds in an ugly setting is not for me or my aspirations, though no doubt it may have its value and its appeal.

We had an enthrallingly bustling time rehearsing, revising, cutting, collecting furniture,

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arguing with scene-painters, stage managers, dress-makers—especially dressmakers. They wanted to exhibit their latest models from Paris.

“ Bother your models,” said I, and I produced drawings and sketches to show exactly what I wanted. They placed difficulty after difficulty in my way. They could not produce the materials. I produced them myself. . . .

It was the same with the milliners, but I was very firm and went straight ahead and procured exactly what I wanted. We all worked like Trojans, and enjoyed ourselves immensely. We had young, keen actors, who caught the light-hearted spirit of the whole thing and flung themselves into it zestfully, while the old hands muttered ominously and prophesied disaster. . . . Even when we had proved ourselves and won success they wagged their heads gloomily and said there was no accounting for the public.

No accounting for the public ?

It is the axiom of my work in the theatre that the public will take and pay for whatever is good of its kind, and the better the kind the more they will take and pay for it. They took and paid for Robin’s play, and at once no fewer than five managers were clamouring to produce plays by him as though there were not at least twenty

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young men equally capable, equally clever, and only waiting to be given the chance.

It was the play that finally softened Sir Herbert's heart towards his son-in-law. He was proud of him and his success, and offered to establish him in a huge house in Rutland Gate. Robin declined. He preferred to remain in Kensington, and very wisely and very shrewdly invested the money that was now pouring in on him. He liked his new popularity, charitably forgot old slights and acts of indifference, and took to entertaining on a small scale. That necessitated alterations in the little house on the Hill, and Lucy and I had a splendid time. . . . Sir Herbert, however, was not to be put off, and insisted on giving them a cottage in the country. He bought a piece of land in Surrey, and for the first time in my life I had the great joy of helping to create a house from the first brick upwards. . . . Some day I may describe it, but here I am confining myself entirely to the consideration of happy houses in London. If I have learned anything, it is that Fortune does seem to attend upon effort. My creative impulse took me to the Robins' original doll's house, and it then joined forces with Lucy's to fertilise Robin's talent. We were borne onwards, gathering good-

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will on our way, creating happiness and bringing light to those about us—were checked, struggled, conquered passive resistance in Lady ———, gave her back her daughter, provided her with a new incentive and a new interest, bowled over the Master in Lunacy like a ninepin, and finally were forced out into the public view to give pleasure and to win applause. And still we feel that the best of life and the best of our work lies before us. It is as absurd to stop to gloat over triumph as to brood over failure. The best always lies ahead, and the search for truth is endless. It is very certain that success to-day means failure to-morrow, and conversely failure is but a stepping-stone to success. . . .

On the night of the play I received in my box an enormous bouquet of chrysanthemums, bound up with ribbons of pale grey and mauve, and attached to these was the inscription, written in a neat little hand :

"Flowers, dear madam, from your garden.

"W. TUNKS."

XVI

Bon Voyage

“Lest it should be thought I am so ignorant of the world as not to know the proper time of forsaking people.”

DAVID SIMPLE.

XVI

Bon Voyage

IF ever Fate sets you up on an eminence, be very sure it is only for the pleasure of shying you down. No sooner had I begun to feel that I had some reason and right to be perfectly pleased with myself, and to think that all was going to be perfectly plain sailing, than Dempsey was taken from me. Her mother took a flying leap from Buenos Ayres and dropped down into a snug little house in Curzon Street, with the announcement, through the newspapers, that she was retiring from the operatic stage and would in future adorn London and at intervals entrance London's ears. She filled her house with a French maid, a Parisian cook, a Spanish gentleman, two chow dogs, and a valuable Persian cat. She forgot Dempsey for a week or two until the landlady of the close-packed house reminded her, and then she came down on us like a cyclone,

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burst open the door, pounced on Dempsey as she fell out with two or three more children and marched her off to Mayfair. There she fitted her out with French clothes, Spanish manners, and an Italian system of vocal exercises—*il bel canto*—by way of discovering whether Dempsey had a voice or no. . . . Kensington Gardens lost half their charm, and even the smallest houses on our hill began to look shabby and depressed.

No Dempsey !

John and Jane began to think the sun was put out.

There was no help for it. Dempsey's mother would have it that we were vulgar people, and so perhaps we are, compared with the angels and the saints. We didn't like being thought vulgar—who does ?—but we could not bear to think of our Dempsey being stifled in a hothouse—our Dempsey, who had such a teeming fancy—Dempsey, who could steal out of the windows by night and slither up the moonbeams to the moon, and play knuckle-bones with the stars; or, if she stayed in bed, entice the sparrows and swallows and pigeons, and the mice and the cats on the roof, to sit in a ring and hear her sing an Irish song—Dempsey, who could understand so quickly whether you

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were glad or sorry, and almost exactly why—Dempsey, who understood better than anybody the importance of houses, because she had so little need of them herself and had no sort of pride of possession—Dempsey, who was absolutely free . . . Dempsey to have her wings clipped !

The worst blow of all to me was when I was faced with the fact that she liked it.

I walked across the Gardens and the Park one night—(years ago Dempsey showed me how to get in and out)—and when I reached Park Lane I heard a lovely note fall, and then another. I walked into a perfect shower of them as I passed into Curzon Street, and the walls and the railings and the telegraph wires above the streets were all thrilling and humming with the music, and no bird dared to sing.

Dempsey looked out of the top window, still singing, and the policeman at the corner of Half-Moon Street was so moved that he burst into tears, walked away, and we had the street to ourselves.

“Darling,” said Dempsey.

“Dempsey, dear, do come back.”

“I can’t,” she said.

“But the blinds in the windows are awful,” I

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cried, "and your front door is the most impossible green."

"I know," she said, "but I'm learning to sing."

"Oh! Dempsey, don't. . . . Come and help me to make houses."

"They've sold me to a Hebrew Jew for five years, and I'm to go away next month."

"Oh! Dempsey, always in terrible hotels and ugly houses, and dreadful red-velvet restaurants and christening-cake theatres. . . ."

"Can't help it!" she said. "Can't help it. I must sing!"

"But, Dempsey——"

"Singing's my way. . . . Making houses is yours, darling—your way and my way of making people happy and warm and alive, and glad of each other and sorry for each other. . . ."

"But think of all the people, the danger. . . ."

"I must sing, darling. . . . Nothing's going to stop me, just as nothing is going to stop you making pretty houses for everyone who loves you."

"Oh! but . . . Dempsey . . . I can't go shopping alone. . . ."

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“Darling, we must do the thing we must do all alone. . . . That’s the way of things. . . .”

She blew me a happy kiss, shook out a new shower of golden notes, drew in her head, and pulled down the most distressing blind of holland and lace I ever saw. . . .

All alone !

Why, yes. It was true. Robin and Lucy were important people now. A little David had appeared to join John and Jane, and a Mary had come hard on his heels; and there were plays and books, and clubs and meetings and societies, and the Countess of X——, and Lord Henry Y——. . . . All their days were filled up. The book-lover had moved to the country. The dog-devotee had never recovered from the loss of his landlady’s sheepdog, which had been drowned in the Serpentine on a cold winter’s day, and he had discovered that Boulogne-sur-Mer was the ideal spot in which to end his days. . . . I could not keep pace with Robin and Lucy. They were too young for me. They were galloping along the way of their lives—the very pleasant way—and I could not beat up my nag to more than a trot. We tried very hard, but I don’t think I have a

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really modern mind, and presently all their friends did seem to be so very modern. I don't think either Robin or Lucy changed at all, but they were caught up by a social machine, which rejected me at once. It became impossible for us to work together. An awful wave of pessimism swept over London, and England generally, and it seemed to affect everybody except myself. On all sides I heard that the country was dying, that it had no moral or financial reserve to draw upon, that it was idle to talk of the greatness of the Empire while all the home industries were seething with discontent; there was an end of art, an end of hope, an end of joy, an end—if people were to be believed—an end of life.

“Gummidge,” said I.

I don't know if other people feel the same, but discontent and grumbling and despair have a tonic effect upon me. I felt only—“Hurrah! the slums are alive enough to feel the divine discontent! Presently we shall clear them all away by Act of Parliament, and then the unemployed, and then we'll build houses in a garden!”

We had a fierce argument about it at the Robins', and the more they “gummided” the

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more hopeful I became. And nobody took me seriously but the Master in Lunacy.

He came to see me the next day, and he sat very quietly for some time, holding his hat on his knee. It was an old-fashioned chimney-pot hat, and he had wide check trousers, and altogether looked as though he had walked out of Dickens. He spoke :

“Everything does seem to be at sixes and sevens, and though you are so hopeful, dear madam, I fancy you are feeling it too.”

Was I ?

I think I was. I had allowed my house to grow a little shabby. I had not enforced my law of change. I was nettled and angry with Fate for having shied me down. The wave of pessimism had robbed me of further expansion. No more houses were forthcoming, and the theatres were producing nothing but pictures of slums and back parlours and courts of law and police-cells. I was bereft of everything. It was as though the plague had descended on the country. Mourning and silence everywhere. It was nothing at all but a violent attack of conscience. The twentieth century, with regard to the nineteenth, was like a young solicitor discovering that his father, defunct, had embezzled and misappropriated the

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money of his clients. . . . The Continental countries had been through it all ten years ago. Conscience and Ibsen ! . . .

Under such conditions, with everybody wanting to wear sackcloth and ashes, what was I to do ?

"You might," said the Master in Lunacy, "you might marry me."

"My dear man," I replied, "you can't change enough now to make marriage pleasant either for you or for your wife."

"But I have changed," he said. "I have changed enormously. Everybody notices it."

"Not enough for that," I said. "That means beginning all over again, learning everything afresh from another person's point of view, or it ends in dullness and disaster."

"I don't know much about the inner workings of people," he said bashfully, as though he were treading on delicate ground. "I'm sorry. It seemed to me you must be lonely."

"Being alone and being lonely are two very different things."

"I know. . . . Only you have so much energy."

"I have—oh ! I have. . . . Oh ! Mr. Tunks, don't you know of a country where people aren't

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worrying their heads about the sins of their fathers, where there aren't people who seem quite sure that there is no future for anybody, a country where everything is moving, moving, changing, expanding, developing, and growing more and more alive, where people are alive enough to want happy houses ? ”

“ I met an American the other day,” said the dear little Master in Lunacy. “ We talked a great deal, but he seemed very hopeful.”

“ America ! ” I cried. “ Dempsey's in America ! I think I'll go there.”

I committed one last act of burglary and entered the Robins' house one night when they were at a dinner given in honour of somebody's knighthood. I took with me a farewell gift for each member of the family. I wandered all over the house, brooding over memories and old thoughts, and the little intimate jokes which are so dear to the circle of every family, and at last I found my way to the nursery where the four children lay sleeping. . . . I sat very still, and suddenly I realised that I was crying. Jane stirred and murmured in her sleep, and I was afraid she would wake up.

Stealthily I crept away, dropped four bless-

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ings as I passed through the door, stole downstairs, found a card on the silver salver in the hall, and wrote on the base of it :

“ Good-bye.”

And with that I walked out of my book.



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